

33-506

NO. _____

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ALEXANDER L. STEVAS,
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IN THE
UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT
OCTOBER TERM, 1982

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,
Petitioner

v.

CONRAD VELA,

Respondent

Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court Of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- I. IS A FEDERAL HABEAS CORPUS PETITIONER REQUIRED, IN ORDER TO EXHAUST HIS AVAILABLE STATE REMEDIES, TO PRESENT THE SAME FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS IN SUPPORT OF A SIXTH AMENDMENT CLAIM TO THE STATE COURT WHICH HE RAISES IN HIS FEDERAL APPLICATION?**

- II. WHERE A FEDERAL HABEAS CORPUS PETITIONER'S CLAIM OF IMPROPERLY ADMITTED EVIDENCE IS BARRED UNDER THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE BECAUSE OF COUNSEL'S FAILURE TO OBJECT IN COMPLIANCE WITH STATE LAW, CAN COUNSEL'S SHORTCOMING SUPPORT A FINDING OF INEFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE SUFFICIENT TO JUSTIFY ISSUANCE OF THE GREAT WRIT?**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
QUESTIONS PRESENTED	i
OPINIONS BELOW	1
JURISDICTION	2
CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED	2
STATEMENT OF THE CASE	
A. Course of Proceedings and Disposition Below	3
B. Statement of Facts	6
SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT	7
REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT	8
I. THERE ARE SPECIAL AND IMPORTANT REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT	8
II. BY RAISING CLAIMS IN THE COURT OF APPEALS WHICH WERE NOT PRESENTED TO THE TEXAS STATE COURTS, RESPONDENT HAS FAILED TO EXHAUST HIS AVAILABLE STATE REMEDIES	9
III. RESPONDENT RECEIVED THE EFFEC- TIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL; TO HOLD OTHERWISE IS TO EVISCERATE THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE	14
CONCLUSION	15

INDEX OF AUTHORITIES

Cases	Page
<i>Bagley, Ex parte</i> , 509 S.W.2d 332 (Tex.Crim.App. 1974)	11
<i>Baldwin v. Blackburn</i> , 653 F.2d 942 (5th Cir. 1981)	11
<i>Beavers v. Balkcom</i> , 636 F.2d 114 (5th Cir. 1981)	10
<i>Brown v. Estelle</i> , 701 F.2d 494 (5th Cir. 1983)	10
<i>Burns v. Estelle</i> , 695 F.2d 847 (5th Cir. 1983)	10
<i>Cupp v. Naughten</i> , 414 U.S. 141 (1973)	12 
<i>Davila, Ex parte</i> , 530 S.W.2d 543 (Tex.Crim.App. 1975)	11
<i>Duffy, Ex parte</i> , 607 S.W.2d 507 (Tex.Crim.App. 1980)	11
<i>Easter v. Estelle</i> , 609 F.2d 756 (5th Cir. 1980)	12
<i>Engle v. Isaac</i> , 456 U.S. 107 (1982)	14
<i>Fay v. Noia</i> , 372 U.S. 391 (1963)	9
<i>Gurule v. Turner</i> , 461 F.2d 1083 (10th Cir. 1972)	10
<i>Guzman, Ex parte</i> , 589 S.W.2d 461 (Tex.Crim.App. 1979)	11
<i>Hart v. Estelle</i> , 634 F.2d 987 (5th Cir. 1981)	10

<i>James v. Copinger</i> , 428 F.2d 235 (4th Cir. 1970), cert. denied <i>sub nom. Callahan v. Slayton</i> , 404 U.S. 959 (1971)	10
<i>Picard v. Connor</i> , 404 U.S. 270 (1971)	10,13
<i>Rhodes v. Estelle</i> , 582 F.2d 972 (5th Cir. 1978)	11
<i>Rose v. Lundy</i> , 445 U.S. 509 (1982)	9
<i>Schiers v. California</i> , 333 F.2d 173 (9th Cir. 1964)	10
<i>Sumner v. Mata</i> , 449 U.S. 539 (1981)	13
<i>Townsend v. Sain</i> , 372 U.S. 293 (1963)	11
<i>United States ex rel. Boodie v. Herold</i> , . 349 F.2d 372 (2nd Cir. 1965)	10
<i>Vela v. Estelle</i> , ____F.2d____, No. 82-1236 (5th Cir., July 5, 1983)	4
<i>Vela v. State</i> , 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex.Crim.App. 1974)	3
<i>Wainwright v. Sykes</i> , 433 U.S. 72 (1977)	8,9,14,15
<i>Washington v. Strickland</i> , 693 F.2d 1243 (5th Cir. 1982)(<i>en banc</i>)	15
Statutes	
U. S. CONST. amend. VI	2
28 U.S.C. §1254(1)	2
28 U.S.C. §2254(b), (c)	2,9
28 U.S.C. §2254(d)	13
Tex. Penal Code art. 1256 (1925)	3
Rule 2(c), Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases In the United States District Courts	11

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IN THE
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W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,
Petitioner

v.

CONRADO VELA,

Respondent

Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court Of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

TO THE HONORABLE JUSTICES OF THE
SUPREME COURT:

The Petitioner respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit entered in this case on July 5, 1983, rehearing en banc denied on August 23, 1983.

OPINIONS BELOW

The panel opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit is attached hereto as Appen-

dix B. The order of the Court of Appeals denying Petitioner's suggestion of rehearing en banc is attached hereto as Appendix A.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Court of Appeals was entered on July 5, 1983. A timely filed suggestion of rehearing en banc was denied August 23, 1983. This petition for writ of certiorari is filed within sixty days after final judgment in this case. This Court's jurisdiction is invoked under 28 U.S.C. §1254(1).

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution provides, in pertinent part, as follows:

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right . . . to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

Section 2254 of Title 28 of the United States Code provides, in pertinent part, as follows:

(b) An application for a writ of habeas corpus in behalf of a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court shall not be granted unless it appears that the applicant has exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State, or that there is either an absence of available State corrective process or the existence of circumstances rendering such process ineffective to protect the rights of the prisoner.

(c) An applicant shall not be deemed to have exhausted the remedies available in the courts

of the State, within the meaning of this section, if he has the right under the law of the State to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

A. Course of Proceedings and Disposition Below

Petitioner has custody of Respondent pursuant to the judgment and sentence of Criminal District Court No. 5 of Dallas County, Texas, in Cause No. C73-7226-JL. On October 2, 1973, Respondent pleaded guilty before a jury to an indictment alleging the offense of murder with malice, the jury being given the option of finding him guilty of either that offense or the offense of murder without malice (Tr. 3, 12, SF 4).¹ Tex. Penal Code art. 1256 (1925) (repealed). Respondent was found guilty and punishment was assessed at ninety-nine years imprisonment (Tr. 24), the death penalty having been waived (Tr. 11). The conviction was upheld on appeal, *Vela v. State*, 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex.Crim.App. 1974), and on collateral attack by state writ of habeas corpus. *Ex parte Vela*, Application No. 9209, denied June 4, 1980.

In his state habeas petition, Respondent complained that counsel was ineffective in failing to (1) object to pre-judicial character testimony; (2) properly object to the victim's widow's testimony; and (3) properly object to the State's closing argument. *Ex parte Vela*, Application No. 9209, at 10-13.

Respondent applied for federal habeas corpus relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §2254 in the United States

1. "Tr." refers to the transcript of Petitioner's trial, and "SF" refers to the statement of facts. "ROA" refers to the record on appeal.

District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Dallas Division. *Vela v. Estelle*, Civil Action No. CA3-81-2022-R. The same allegations which were raised in state court were raised in Respondent's application in federal district court. Relief was denied on April 8, 1982 (ROA 32, 33), with the court adopting the federal magistrate's report (see, ROA 21, *et seq.*). Respondent appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit from this adverse judgment. After Respondent filed his *pro se* brief and Petitioner filed a brief in response thereto, the Court of Appeals appointed counsel for Respondent and requested further briefing. In his supplemental brief filed in the Court of Appeals, Respondent raised additional claims of ineffective assistance, including that defense counsel consistently failed to act as a competent attorney (Supplemental Brief at 31); that he failed to prepare his client for questions regarding his guilty plea; that counsel neglected to object to evidentiary foundations, hearsay, improper summation testimony, facts not in evidence, irrelevant questions, and prejudicial and improper character evidence (Supplemental Brief at 31-32); and that his trial attorney often objected on the wrong ground, failed to properly preserve error for appellate review (other than those grounds of error presented in state court), failed to stipulate to evidence, and continually asked trivial questions (Supplemental Brief at 32). Additionally, Respondent elaborated in great detail as to how counsel performed inadequately in the defense presentation and summation arguments (Supplemental Brief at 33-34).

On July 5, 1983, a panel of the Court of Appeals reversed the judgment of the district court and remanded the cause "with instructions to grant the writ of habeas corpus unless the State elects within a reasonable time to retry Vela." *Vela v. Estelle*, ____ F.2d____, No. 82-1236 (5th Cir., July 5, 1983) In rejecting Petitioner's argument that Respondent had failed to satisfy the statutory exhaustion requirement by

raising unexhausted claims of ineffective assistance on appeal, the panel reasoned as follows:

Here, *all* the instances of ineffective assistance alleged in Vela's supplemental brief to this Court were contained in the trial record reviewed by the state habeas court when it denied Vela's original petition. This petition argued ineffective assistance on the basis of counsel's entire performance. The petition cited the entire record below, singling out for comment certain strikingly prejudicial errors.

In denying Vela's petition, the state habeas court cited a number of instances in which counsel performed his duties well, examples never mentioned in Vela's petition. The state court findings therefore indicate that the court carried out its own independent analysis of counsel's performance. The transcript and all the documents in this case were transmitted to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, which denied the application without written order. We must presume that its consideration of the record, and all the facts contained therein, was no less thorough than that of the state habeas court.

* * *

However, although Vela highlighted in his brief to this Court a number of trial errors that were not specifically mentioned in his pro se state habeas petition, all of these errors support the same constitutional claim urged before the state court, and all are readily discernible from the review of the entire record which that court was obligated to carry out. Characterizing

these allegations as "unexhausted claims" would require us to find that the state habeas court failed in its duty to evaluate counsel's performance on the basis of the record as a whole. This we are unwilling to do, given that court's citation in its findings of instances drawn from the record in which counsel performed properly. Concluding as we do that the alleged "new facts" were not new at all, we cannot see how our consideration of the same facts in any way undercuts the state court, or creates any friction between the state and federal judicial systems. Accordingly, we hold that Vela has exhausted all available state remedies as required by §2254(b), (c), and move on to an analysis of the merits of his claim."

Appendix B at 14-16.

The panel also found that Respondent received the ineffective assistance of counsel at trial because counsel failed to specifically object, in compliance with state law, to certain inadmissible, prejudicial testimony. Appendix B at 27-28. Petitioner filed a suggestion of rehearing *en banc* in which he argued that Respondent had not exhausted his state remedies and that the panel erred in finding that Respondent did not receive the effective assistance of counsel. Rehearing was summarily denied on August 23, 1983.

B. Statement of Facts

Respondent was alleged to have murdered with malice Kenneth Byron Brown (Tr. 3). The evidence showed that Fred Vela, Respondent's brother, initiated a verbal confrontation with Brown, a convenience store clerk, at the latter's place of employment (SF 36, 41, 133). When Respondent approached the pair, Brown struck him in

the mouth with his fist, knocking Respondent off his feet (SF 43, 135, 194). Enraged, Respondent went home, retrieved his automatic pistol, and returned to the store twenty minutes later (SF 27, 46, 47, 140, 195-96). He entered the store and opened fire, shooting the unarmed victim in the back and killing him as he tried to flee (SF 24-25, 47-48, 69, 91, 100, 102). Respondent testified that he had not intended to kill Brown (SF 195-96), stating, "I don't know what happened . . . the gun went off since this is an automatic, you know, I just kept firing" (SF 196). Respondent returned to his home, where he was arrested a short time later (SF 68, 85).

Testimony was presented that both Respondent and his victim had even dispositions and were good-natured and that Respondent had a reputation as a peaceful and law-abiding citizen (SF 42, 57, 62, 63, 142, 156, 161-62, 165, 180, 184-85). It was stipulated that Respondent was on probation for possession of marijuana (SF 129-30). After the jury heard evidence of Respondent's arrests for disturbing the peace by fighting and discharging a firearm, strong-arm robbery, and carrying a prohibited weapon, Respondent was allowed to explain their circumstances (SF 150-52, 156-57, 167-68, 189). Upon a finding that Respondent was guilty of murder with malice, punishment was assessed at ninety-nine years confinement in the Texas Department of Corrections.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

There are special and important reasons to consider the questions presented. In his supplemental brief in the Court of Appeals Respondent presented for the first time numerous complaints concerning trial counsel's performance that had never been raised in the Texas courts. Respondent's failure to exhaust state remedies as to those issues required dismissal of the appeal. In

holding that the state habeas court must be presumed to have reviewed errors not pled by Respondent, the Court of Appeals' opinion disregarded the rule that a habeas petitioner must accord the state courts a "fair opportunity" to address his allegations of federal constitutional violations and imposes an unrealistic burden on the state courts which offends the comity interests underlying the statutory exhaustion requirement.

Respondent received the effective assistance of counsel. It is well settled that counsel's failure to object in compliance with state law cannot constitute "cause" under the procedural default doctrine of *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977). By holding that counsel's failure in this regard may amount to constitutionally inadequate assistance, the Court of Appeals' opinion effectively abolishes the rule of *Wainwright v. Sykes*.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

I. THERE ARE SPECIAL AND IMPORTANT REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT.

The Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit disregarded controlling decisions of this Court in holding that Respondent (1) had exhausted his state remedies and (2) did not receive the effective assistance of counsel. The Court of Appeals held that Respondent had satisfied the statutory exhaustion requirement even though he presented factual allegations in support of his federal habeas claim of ineffective assistance of counsel which had never been raised in the state courts. Under the reasoning of the Court of Appeals, a federal habeas petitioner will be deemed to have exhausted state remedies as to any Sixth Amendment claim simply by alleging in state court that the totality of counsel's representation was constitutionally deficient. This holding ignores the requirement that the state courts be afforded a fair op-

portunity to address and, if need be, correct alleged deprivations of constitutional rights. When the state courts are not informed of the factual bases upon which counsel's representation is attacked, it cannot be said that they were given a fair opportunity to consider the claim raised in federal court.

The Court of Appeals' holding that counsel rendered ineffective assistance constitutes an equally glaring departure from settled precedent. Counsel was held ineffective solely on the basis of his failure to object to a line of inadmissible, prejudicial evidence. It is undisputed that any federal habeas claim as to the admission of this evidence would be barred by the procedural default doctrine of *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977). By granting habeas relief solely on the basis of counsel's failure to lodge a procedurally correct objection to this evidence, the Court of Appeals effectively abrogated the procedural default doctrine and ignored the long-standing rule that counsel's efficacy must be determined on the totality of the circumstances.

II. BY RAISING CLAIMS IN THE COURT OF APPEALS WHICH WERE NOT PRESENTED TO THE TEXAS STATE COURTS, RESPONDENT HAS FAILED TO EXHAUST HIS AVAILABLE STATE REMEDIES.

Under 28 U.S.C. §2254(b), (c), a federal district court may not grant the writ unless the petitioner has "exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State." The exhaustion requirement is founded on notions of comity and is designed to give the state courts the initial opportunity to pass upon and correct errors of federal law in the state prisoner's conviction. *Rose v. Lundy*, 445 U.S. 509 (1982); *Fay v. Noia*, 372 U.S. 391, 438 (1963). For a claim to be exhausted, the state court system must have been apprised of the same facts and

legal theory upon which a petitioner basis his assertions, *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 276 (1971), and a "mixed" petition which contains both exhausted and unexhausted claims is subject to dismissal. *Rose v. Lundy*, *supra*.

Numerous decisions of the Courts of Appeals hold that when a petitioner makes the same claim to a federal court that he presented to the state courts but supports that claim with factual allegations that were not made to the state courts, he has failed to exhaust his available state remedies. *E.g., Brown v. Estelle*, 701 F.2d 494 (5th Cir. 1983); *Burns v. Estelle*, 695 F.2d 847 (5th Cir. 1983); *Beavers v. Balkcom*, 636 F.2d 114 (5th Cir. 1981); *Hart v. Estelle*, 634 F.2d 987 (5th Cir. 1981); *Gurule v. Turner*, 461 F.2d 1083 (10th Cir. 1972); *James v. Copinger*, 428 F.2d 235 (4th Cir. 1970), *cert. denied sub nom. Callahan v. Slayton*, 404 U.S. 959 (1971); *United States ex rel. Boodie v. Herold*, 349 F.2d 372 (2nd Cir. 1965); *Schiers v. California*, 333 F.2d 173 (9th Cir. 1964).

The Court of Appeals distinguished the above authorities on the ground that in those cases, the unexhausted factual allegations presented to the federal court concerned matters outside the record, whereas "(h)ere, *all* the instances of ineffective assistance alleged in Vela's supplemental brief to this Court were contained in the trial record reviewed by the state habeas court when it denied Vela's original petition." Appendix B at 14. Because the state habeas court reviewed the entire record in evaluating the efficacy of counsel's performance, and because Respondent's unexhausted claims "were readily discernible from the review of the entire record," Appendix B at 15, the Court of Appeals concluded that the state convicting court must have considered every imaginable Sixth Amendment claim supported by the record regardless whether those claims ac-

tually were raised by Respondent in his state writ application.²

The effect of this holding is quite clear: Under the reasoning of the Court of Appeals, a state habeas petitioner must allege only that, based on the totality of the circumstances, counsel was ineffective, and the state courts are "obligated" to comb the entire record for any errors of counsel which may support the allegation. The federal habeas court then is free to presume that every conceivable error of counsel, whether or not raised by the petitioner, was considered and thus exhausted. This approach is unrealistic in that it places a tremendous burden on the state courts, erodes traditional notions of comity on which the exhaustion requirement is founded, and flies in the face of established rules of habeas corpus pleading.

Under Rule 2(c), Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases, the petition must "set forth in summary form the facts supporting each of the grounds thus specified." Consequently, federal habeas claims which are unsupported by specific factual allegations are subject to dismissal without a hearing. *E.g., Townsend v. Sain*, 372 U.S. 293, 312 (1963); *Baldwin v. Blackburn*, 653 F.2d 942 (5th Cir. 1981); *Rhodes v. Estelle*, 582 F.2d 972 (5th Cir. 1978). The opinion of the Court of Appeals, however, places a far greater burden on a state convicting court in that it requires a review of the *entire* record regardless of the specific factual allegations set out in the state writ application. Thus, a state habeas petition which cites only

2. The state trial court's findings were not adopted by the Court of Criminal Appeals and thus are entitled to no weight. *See, Ex parte Duffy*, 607 S.W.2d 507 (Tex.Crim.App. 1980); *Ex parte Guzman*, 589 S.W.2d 461 (Tex.Crim.App. 1979); *Ex parte Davila*, 530 S.W.2d 543 (Tex.Crim.App. 1975); *Ex parte Bagley*, 509 S.W.2d 332 (Tex.Crim.App. 1974).

one instance of allegedly ineffective assistance or complains only that the totality of counsel's representation was deficient creates a "duty" on the state habeas court to review a trial record consisting of thousands of pages of transcribed testimony and pleadings. The burden thus placed on a state habeas court is far greater than that on a federal habeas court, which is required to review only those portions of the record pertinent to the claims actually pled by the petitioner.

Further, the holding of the court below is in conflict with prior decisions of that court. For example, in *Easter v. Estelle*, 609 F.2d 756 (5th Cir. 1980), the petitioner alleged on appeal that the state trial court's jury instructions were defective because they (1) omitted a charge on a lesser included offense and (2) failed to instruct the jury on the correct culpability requirement for the offense charged. The Court of Appeals held that the first claim was meritless as a matter of law and that the second claim had not been exhausted and therefore was not properly presented on appeal.

This issue was never raised in any of the state court proceedings or in the federal district court. The issue was first raised in this court. Therefore, Easter has failed to exhaust his remedies. *Easter cannot merely object to one aspect of the jury charge and assume that all claims against the charge have been exhausted.*

609 F.2d at 758-59 (emphasis added).

It is axiomatic that in determining the sufficiency of a particular jury instruction, the charge must be viewed as a whole. *Cupp v. Naughten*, 414 U.S. 141 (1973). Thus, in *Easter*, as here, the state trial court had a duty to review the entire charge in assessing the validity of the claim actually presented to it. In *Easter*, unlike the instant case, the state habeas court was not presumed to

have considered a claim which was not pled in the state writ application. The Court of Appeals' holding cannot be squared with *Easter*.

If a *federal* habeas court is not required to review portions of the record which are irrelevant to a petitioner's claims, certainly traditional comity notions should bar the imposition of a similar requirement on a *state* habeas court. Here, however, because the state convicting court actually did review the entire record, the Court of Appeals concluded that it necessarily considered every arguable shortcoming of counsel regardless whether they were pled by Respondent. The state habeas court is thus mired between a procedural Scylla and Charybdis. If the state court fails to review the entire record in considering a Sixth Amendment claim, it will be held to have abandoned its duty to review the "totality" of counsel's representation, and its findings will not be entitled to the statutory presumption of correctness. 28 U.S.C. §2254(d)(6). *See, Sumner v. Mata*, 449 U.S. 539 (1981). If the state habeas court does review the entire record, the habeas petitioner will be held to have exhausted every conceivable claim which is arguably supported by the record, even those as to which the state writ application is silent.

The exhaustion doctrine requires that the allegations raised in federal court be "fairly presented" to the state courts for their consideration. *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. at 275. The analysis of the Court of Appeals' obliterates this requirement, holding that presentation of a conclusory Sixth Amendment claim satisfies the exhaustion statute. On the facts of this case, it cannot be said that Respondent's ineffective assistance ground was "fairly presented" to the state courts.

III. RESPONDENT RECEIVED THE EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL; TO HOLD OTHERWISE IS TO EVISCERATE THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE.

The procedural default doctrine enunciated in *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977) teaches that absent cause for the procedural default and actual prejudice from the error, principles of comity and federalism prevent federal courts from granting habeas relief to state prisoners whose claim is non-reviewable in state court because of the default. It is also well settled that a lawyer's incompetence or unfamiliarity with the relevant law is insufficient to establish "cause" for failure to object:

We do not suggest that every astute counsel would have relied upon *Winship* to assert the unconstitutionality of a rule saddling criminal defendants with the burden of proving an affirmative defense. Every trial presents a myriad of possible claims. Counsel might have overlooked or chosen to omit respondents' due process argument while pursuing other avenues of defense. We have long recognized, however, that the Constitution guarantees criminal defendants only a fair trial and a competent attorney. It does not insure that defense counsel will recognize and raise every conceivable constitutional claim. Where the basis of a constitutional claim is available, and other defense counsel have perceived and litigated that claim, the demands of comity and finality counsel against labelling alleged unawareness of the objection as cause for a procedural default.

Engle v. Isaac, 456 U.S. 107, 133-34 (1982).

There is no dispute that Respondent's claims of improperly admitted evidence are barred under *Wainwright v. Sykes*. See, Appendix B at 20-24. By holding that counsel was ineffective for failing to object, the Court of Appeals effectively abolished the procedural default doctrine. Henceforth, federal habeas petitioners are on notice that federal habeas relief may be forthcoming if substantive claims which are barred by *Wainwright v. Sykes* are simply couched in terms of a Sixth Amendment violation. See, *Washington v. Strickland*, 693 F.2d 1243, 1261 n.30 (5th Cir. 1982)(*en banc*).

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, Petitioner prays that the petition for certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX A

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

No. 82-1236

CONRAD VELA,

Petitioner-Appellant,

versus

W.J. ESTELLE, JR., Director,
Texas Department of Corrections,

Respondent-Appellee.

Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Northern District of Texas

ON SUGGESTION FOR REHEARING EN BANC

(Opinion 7/5/83, 5 Cir., 198____, ____F.2d____)

(AUGUST 23, 1983)

Before THORNBERRY, RUBIN and TATE, Circuit
Judges.

PER CURIAM:

(✓) Treating the suggestion for rehearing en banc as a petition for panel rehearing, it is ordered that the petition for panel rehearing is DENIED. No member of the panel nor Judge in regular active service of this Court having requested that the Court be polled on rehearing

en banc (Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and Local Rule 35), the suggestion for Rehearing En Banc is DENIED.

() Treating the suggestion for rehearing en banc as a petition for panel rehearing, the petition for panel rehearing is DENIED. The judges in regular active service of this Court having been polled at the request of one of said judges and a majority of said judges not having voted in favor of it (Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and Local Rule 35), the suggestion for rehearing En Banc is DENIED.

ENTERED FOR THE COURT:

/ s /

United States Circuit Judge

REHG-8

APPENDIX B

Conrad VELA, Petitioner-Appellant,

v.

**W.J. ESTELLE, JR., Director, Texas
Department of Corrections,
Respondent-Appellee.**

No. 82-1236.

**United States Court of Appeals,
Fifth Circuit.**

July 5, 1983.

Prisoner in Texas Department of Correction appealed from denial by the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, at Dallas, Jerry Buchmeyer, Jr., of his petition for writ of habeas corpus alleging ineffective assistance of counsel. The Court of Appeals, Thornberry, Circuit Judge, held that: (1) petitioner exhausted all available state remedies; (2) Court of Appeals was free to substitute its own judgment for that of district court; (3) counsel's conduct in making only general objection to admissibility of inadmissible testimony constituted fundamental error; (4) counsel's failure to object to inadmissible, prejudicial testimony constituted fundamental error; (5) defendant was rendered ineffective assistance of counsel; (6) counsel's ineffectiveness resulted in actual and substantial disadvantage to defendant; and (7) state failed to carry its burden of showing admission of testimony was harmless beyond reasonable doubt.

Reversed and remanded with instructions.

1. Habeas Corpus —45.3(1)

Principle that state prisoner must normally exhaust all available state remedies before he can apply for federal habeas relief serves to minimize friction between federal and state systems of justice by allowing state initial opportunity to pass upon and correct alleged violations of prisoner's federal rights. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(b, c).

2. Habeas Corpus —45.3(1)

Exhaustion by state prisoner of all available state remedies before he can apply for federal habeas relief is not jurisdictional prerequisite, but derives from consideration of comity between state and federal judicial systems. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(b, c).

3. Habeas Corpus —43.3(1)

Rule that state prisoner is required to exhaust his state remedies before he applies for federal habeas relief is not graven in stone. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(b, c).

4. Habeas Corpus —45.3(9)

To have exhausted his state remedies, habeas petitioner must have fairly presented substance of his claim to state court; it is not enough that petitioner has merely been through state courts. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(b, c).

5. Habeas Corpus —45.3(9)

Normally, exhaustion requirement is not satisfied if habeas petitioner presents new legal theories or entirely new factual claims in his petition to federal court; thus, where petitioner advances in federal court argument based on legal theory distinct from that relied upon in state court, he fails to satisfy exhaustion requirement. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(b, c).

6. Habeas Corpus —45.3(9)

Where all inferences of ineffective assistance alleged in habeas petitioner's supplemental brief were contained in trial record reviewed by state habeas court when it denied petitioner's original petition, petition argued ineffective assistance on basis of counsel's entire performance, and state habeas court cited number of instances in which counsel performed his duties well which indicated that court carried out its duty to perform independent analysis of counsel's performance, petitioner exhausted all available state remedies. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254 (b,c); U.S.C.A. Const.Amends. 6, 14.

7. Habeas Corpus ---113(12)

Whether counsel rendered effective assistance to defendant is mixed question of law and fact; therefore, in reviewing habeas decision of district court, Court of Appeals is free to substitute its judgment for that of district court.

8. Habeas Corpus —113(12)

Court of Appeals' freedom to substitute its own judgment for that of district court in habeas proceedings does not extend to state court's findings of subsidiary fact, which are entitled to presumption of correctness. 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(d).

9. Constitutional Law —268.1(2)

Right to counsel guaranteed by Sixth Amendment is fundamental right applicable by Fourteenth Amendment to states. U.S.C.A. Const.Amends. 6, 14.

10. Criminal Law —641.13(1)

Vital component of judicial system of right to counsel includes within its broad compass right to minimal quality of counsel, defined as right to effective assistance of counsel. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

11. Criminal Law—988

Right to counsel is present at every stage of criminal proceeding where substantial rights of criminal accused may be affected, and consequently extends to sentencing proceedings in criminal case. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

12. Criminal Law —273.2(1)

Plea of guilty does not strip defendant of his right to effective assistance of counsel. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

13. Criminal Law —641.13(1)

Standard for determination of whether reasonably effective assistance was rendered, based on totality of circumstances in entire record, applies in imprisonment cases as well as death penalty cases.

14. Criminal Law —1035(7)

Where witness' testimony as to good character of victim was improperly admitted because defendant never sought to justify murder and record contained no evidence of any threat by victim against defendant before dispute erupted, nor any evidence portraying victim as violent or dangerous man, counsel's error in making only general objection to testimony, thereby failing to preserve error for review, constituted fundamental error.

15. Criminal Law —1035(7)

Where testimony of murder victim's widow had no bearing whatsoever on any material issue in case, its sole purpose was to inflame minds of jury and it was consequently inadmissible, defense counsel's failure to object to similar testimony later in trial resulted in waiver of the issue on review and was fundamental error.

16. Criminal Law —641.13

While legal standard of effective representation does not change from case to case, this does not mean that severity of sentence faced by criminal defendant should not be considered in determining whether counsel's performance meets standard. U.S.C.A. Const.Amends. 6, 14.

17. Habeas Corpus —92(1)

Where habeas petitioner did not claim that he was denied counsel "reasonably likely" to render effective assistance, but rather, claimed that he was denied counsel "rendering" effective assistance, counsel's performance would be evaluated from prospective of counsel, taking into account all circumstances of case, but only as those circumstances were known to him at time in question. U.S.C.A. Const.Amends. 6, 14.

18. Habeas Corpus —85.5(11)

Defendant has burden of proving ineffective assistance of counsel by preponderance of evidence.

19. Criminal Law —641.13(1)

In most cases, single critical error may render counsel's performance constitutionally defective. U.S.C.A. Const.Amends. 6, 14.

20. Criminal Law —641.13(7)

Counsel's performance in sentencing hearing fell below range of competency generally demanded of attorneys in criminal cases, and constituted ineffective assistance, where counsel committed many errors, including failure to object to inadmissible testimony and failure to specify grounds of objection, and where several errors were sufficiently grave to preclude review of serious claims on direct appeal. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

21. Habeas Corpus —25.1(6)

Where defense counsel allowed prejudicial evidence on murder victim's good character to be introduced in defendant's sentencing hearing, thereby allowing jury to consider it as if it had been material, probative evidence, relevant to issue of defendant's sentence, and waiving issue for consideration on direct appeal, counsel's ineffectiveness resulted in actual and substantial disadvantage to defendant. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

22. Criminal Law —1177

It is not enough to say that since jury could have assessed life sentence without having heard prejudicial testimony, admission of prejudicial testimony at sentencing hearing was harmless; therefore, state failed to carry its burden of showing that admission of inadmissible testimony concerning character of murder victim was harmless beyond reasonable doubt in sentencing portion of defendant's murder prosecution in which he received sentence of 99 years.

23. Criminal Law —986.6(3)

Sentencing process consists of weighing mitigating and aggravating factors, making adjustments in severi-

ty of sentence consistent with this calculus; each item of testimony has incremental effect, and large segments of highly prejudicial, inadmissible testimony have considerable effect, skewing calculus and invalidating results reached.

24. Habeas Corpus —112

Under Texas law, where jury assesses punishment, appellate court may not reverse and remand solely for reassessment of punishment; therefore, habeas petitioner who was rendered ineffective assistance at sentencing stage of his murder trial was entitled to new trial on issue of guilt as well as punishment. U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 6, 14.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

Before THORNBERRY, RUBIN and TATE, Circuit Judges.

THORNBERRY, Circuit Judge:

INTRODUCTION:

Petitioner Conrado Vela, a prisoner in the Texas Department of Corrections, appeals from the district court's denial of his petition for a writ of habeas corpus alleging ineffective assistance of counsel. We conclude that Vela's counsel at his sentencing proceeding was constitutionally deficient, and that counsel's errors resulted in actual and substantial disadvantage to his client's defense. Accordingly, we reverse the district court's judgment and remand with instructions to grant the writ unless the State elects within a reasonable time to retry Vela.

FACTS AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY:

On the evening of July 1, 1973, a dispute erupted between petitioner's brother, Fred Vela, and Kenneth Brown, a clerk at the convenience store where the disturbance occurred. Brown accepted Fred Vela's invitation to "step outside" and settle their differences. As they left the store, they encountered petitioner, Conrado Vela, who became involved in the dispute. Brown punched petitioner in the mouth, knocking him off his feet, then went back into the store. Enraged, petitioner sped home, retrieved his automatic pistol, and returned to the store twenty minutes later. Upon entering the store, he opened fire on Brown. Petitioner fired six to eight times, striking Brown in the back and killing him. Petitioner then returned home, where he was later arrested.

Petitioner [hereinafter Vela] pled guilty in open court to the indictment charging him with murder with malice of Kenneth Brown. The guilty plea was accepted by the trial court and repeated for the jury. Under the Texas procedure in effect at that time, the jury then had the option of finding Vela guilty of murder with malice aforethought, which carried a punishment of two years to life, or murder without malice aforethought, carrying a term of two to five years imprisonment.¹

The jury found Vela guilty of murder with malice aforethought and assessed his punishment at 99 years confinement in the Texas Department of Corrections.

Vela shortly thereafter appealed his conviction in state court through court-appointed counsel, urging three points of error: 1) The trial court erred in admit-

1. See Tex. Penal Code Ann. §§ 1256, 1257, 1257b, & 1257c (Vernon 1970) (repealed 1973).

ting testimony by Harvey Martin as to Brown's good character, when that was not in issue; 2) The trial court erred in admitting testimony by Brown's widow that was irrelevant, immaterial and calculated solely to prejudice the jury; 3) The trial court erred in failing to grant Vela's motion for a mistrial on the ground that the State's closing argument to the jury was harmful, prejudicial and manifestly improper.

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals ruled that: 1) Although it was error to admit the prejudicial character testimony, Vela's counsel failed to make a specific objection sufficient to preserve the error for review; 2) Testimony by Brown's widow was completely irrelevant, immaterial, and prejudicial. However, since all but a small portion of this inadmissible testimony was admitted in other testimony without an objection from Vela's counsel, there was no reversible error; 3) Because counsel failed to specifically object to the State's closing argument as outside the record and inflammatory, the alleged error was waived. Unable to reach the merits of any of Vela's asserted points of error because of counsel's failure to preserve them for review by making the proper objections, the Court affirmed Vela's conviction. *Vela v. State*, 516 S.W.2d 176, 176-179 (Tex.Cr.App.1974).

Vela next filed a petition for habeas corpus in the court that had convicted him, alleging that he had been denied his constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel at his sentencing proceeding. The court concluded that Vela had received effective assistance of counsel, and recommended that all relief be denied. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals then denied Vela's application without written order.

Vela next applied *pro se* for federal habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254 (West 1977), again claiming ineffective assistance of counsel. The magistrate

concluded that trial counsel's "inartful" performance "more than adequately represented the Petitioner," and alternatively found that even if counsel's performance was seriously inadequate, Vela had failed to show that the sentencing proceeding was so unfairly prejudicial as a whole to be "fundamentally unfair" in light of the overwhelming evidence of guilt. The district court adopted the magistrate's findings, conclusions and recommendation, and dismissed Vela's petition. Vela appeals that dismissal to this Court.

ANALYSIS:

Exhaustion Requirement

We are faced at the outset with the State's contention that Vela's supplemental brief to this Court contains claims which the state habeas court never had the opportunity to consider.² The State maintains that we may not entertain these unexhausted claims, and must dismiss Vela's petition as mixed. Specifically, the State alleges that Vela now for the first time claims that his attorney at trial failed to prepare him for questions regarding his guilty plea, neglected to make a large number of objections he should have made, or objected on improper grounds, failed to properly stipulate to evidence, and performed inadequately in his summation. The State does not object to Vela's citation on appeal of the three central errors urged in his state habeas petition as grounds for a finding that counsel was ineffective, *viz.* 1) failure to properly object to prejudicial character testimony, 2) failure to properly object to Brown's widow's testimony, and 3) failure to properly object to the State's closing argument.

2. Vela initially appealed *pro se*, but is now represented by counsel on this appeal.

[1] The principle that a state prisoner must normally exhaust all available state remedies before he can apply for federal habeas relief has been established for nearly a century. *See Ex parte Royall*, 117 U.S. 241, 6 S.Ct. 734, 29 L.Ed. 868 (1886). This exhaustion requirement, now codified at 28 U.S.C.A. §§ 2254(b), (c),³ "serves to minimize friction between our federal and state systems of justice by allowing the State an initial opportunity to pass upon and correct alleged violations of prisoners' federal rights." *Duckworth v. Serrano*, 454 U.S. 1, 102 S.Ct. 18, 19, 70 L.Ed.2d 1 (1981); *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 92 S.Ct. 509, 512, 30 L.Ed.2d 438 (1971). *See Rose v. Lundy*, 455 U.S. 509, 102 S.Ct. 1198, 1202-03, 71 L.Ed.2d 379 (1982).

[2-4] Exhaustion is not a jurisdictional prerequisite, but derives from considerations of comity between the state and federal judicial systems.⁴ *Felder v. Estelle*, 693 F.2d 549 (5th Cir.1982); *Galtieri v. Wainwright*, 582 F.2d 348, 354 (5th Cir. 1978). The rule that a state

3. (b) An application for a writ of habeas corpus in behalf of a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court shall not be granted unless it appears that the applicant has exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State, or that there is either an absence of available State corrective process or the existence of circumstances rendering such process ineffective to protect the rights of the prisoner.

(c) An applicant shall not be deemed to have exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State, within the meaning of this section, if he has the right under the law of the State to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented.

28 U.S.C.A. §§ 2254(b), (c) (West 1977).

4. As the Supreme Court noted in *Fay v. Noia*, 372 U.S. 391, 83 S.Ct. 822, 9 L.Ed.2d 837 (1963), "it would be unseemly in our dual systems of government for a federal district court to upset a state court conviction without an opportunity to the State to correct a constitutional violation." *Id.* 83 S.Ct. at 838 (quoting *Darr v. Burford*, 339 U.S. 200, 70 S.Ct. 587, 590, 94 L.Ed. 761 (1950)).

prisoner is required to exhaust his state remedies before he applies for federal habeas relief is not graven in stone. *Minor v. Lucas*, 697 F.2d 697 (5th Cir.1983). To have exhausted his state remedies, a habeas petitioner must have fairly presented the substance of his claim to the state courts. *Picard*, 92 S.Ct. at 513 (1971). It is not enough that petitioner has merely been through the state courts. *Id.* 92 S.Ct. at 512.

[5] Normally, the exhaustion requirement is not satisfied if a petitioner presents new legal theories⁵ or entirely new factual claims in his petition to the federal court. *Brown v. Estelle*, 701 F.2d 494 (5th Cir. 1983); *Winfrey v. Maggio*, 664 F.2d 550, 553 (5th Cir.1981); *Hart v. Estelle*, 634 F.2d 987, 989 (5th Cir.1981); *Messelt v. State of Alabama*, 595 F.2d 247, 250 (5th Cir. 1979).

Here, there is no dispute that the alleged sixth amendment violation and its underlying legal theories were presented to both the state habeas court and the federal district court. Vela argued before both courts that counsel's failure to render reasonably effective assistance deprived him of his sixth amendment right to counsel, as incorporated in the fourteenth amendment due process clause.

The only dispute here is over those instances of alleged substandard conduct cited in this appeal which were not explicitly enumerated in Vela's state habeas petition.

This Court has normally refused to review on habeas entirely new factual claims never presented to the state habeas court. *Brown*, 701 F.2d at 495-96; *Burns v.*

5. Thus, where petitioner advances in federal court an argument based on a legal theory distinct from that relied upon in the state court, he fails to satisfy the exhaustion requirement. *Anderson v. Harless*, ____ U.S.____, 103 S.Ct. 276, 278, 74 L.Ed.2d 3 (1982).

Estelle, 695 F.2d 847, 489-50 (5th Cir. 1983); *Hart*, 634 F.2d at 989; *Knoxson v. Estelle*, 574 F.2d 1339, 1340 (5th Cir.1978). In *Brown*, petitioner supplemented the record on appeal with three affidavits that corroborated several substantially unsupported contentions argued before the state court. We affirmed the district court's dismissal of Brown's petition for failure to exhaust available state remedies. In *Hart*, we remanded with directions to dismiss the habeas petition because it presented entirely new medical testimony never considered by the state court. In *Knoxson*, we dismissed the petition because it contained new factual allegations based on documents which became part of the record only after the state habeas court had dismissed the petition. Similarly, in *Burns*, we found that petitioner had failed to exhaust his state remedies when he presented in support of his ineffective assistance of counsel claim entirely new evidence of the existence of a deceased alibi witness whom his attorney arguably should have called to testify at trial. None of this evidence was presented to the state habeas court. As we stated in *Burns*:

The "substance" of Burns' claim is quite different in his federal petition. For the first time, he now sets forth the scenario involving the alibi witness. Although petitioner conceded that he did not present these allegations in the state proceedings, he argues that he was never given the opportunity to do so. The state record, however, is simply barren of any hint or reference to a purported alibi defense or the existence of any alibi witness. The vague nature of the allegations in his appeal to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals belies the contention that he had no opportunity to apprise the court of the contentions underlying his claim. In *Hart v. Estelle*, 634 F.2d 987 (5th Cir.1981), this court held that state remedies may not be considered exhausted "where entirely new factual

claims are made in support of the writ before the federal court." *Id.* at 989. We believe that the factual bases underlying petitioner's federal claim are significantly different from those underlying his state claim, and therefore, require a finding that Burns has not exhausted his state remedies.

Burns, 695 F.2d at 849-50. Our case is quite different from both *Burns* and the other cases discussed above. Here, *all* the instances of ineffective assistance alleged in Vela's supplemental brief to this Court were contained in the trial record reviewed by the state habeas court when it denied Vela's original petition. This petition argued ineffective assistance on the basis of counsel's entire performance. The petition cited the entire record below, singling out for comment certain strikingly prejudicial errors.

In denying Vela's petition, the state habeas court cited a number of instances in which counsel performed his duties well, examples never mentioned in Vela's petition. The state court's findings therefore indicate that the court carried out its own independent analysis of counsel's performance. The transcript and all the documents in this case were transmitted to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, which denied the application without written order. We must presume that its consideration of the record, and all the facts contained therein, was no less thorough than that of the state habeas court.

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the federal magistrate repeatedly refer to counsel's conduct as a whole. Like the state habeas court, the federal magistrate relied on numerous particulars of counsel's performance that were not raised in Vela's federal habeas petition. The district court order denying habeas relief was premised upon "an independent review

of the pleadings, files and records in this case." Recognizing that the federal court's consideration of the entire record is not dispositive of the question of Vela's exhaustion of available state remedies, we nevertheless deem it relevant insofar as it illustrates that court's application of the general rule that counsel's performance is to be evaluated on the basis of "the *totality* of the circumstances in the entire record." *Washington v. Watkins*, 655 F.2d 1346, 1355 (5th Cir.1981), *cert. denied*, 456 U.S. 949, 102 S.Ct. 2021, 72 L.Ed.2d 474 (1982) (citations omitted) (emphasis in original). Although the state habeas court in its findings and conclusions made passing reference to the outdated "farce or mockery of justice" standard of effective assistance of counsel, it, like the federal court, actually applied the "reasonably effective assistance" standard which requires an evaluation of counsel's conduct on the basis of the record as a whole.

[6] We recognize that the exhaustion requirement is designed to prevent unnecessary friction between the state and federal systems, and that federal review of state habeas orders entails significant costs. *Engle v. Isaac*, 456 U.S. 107, 102 S.Ct. 1558, 1571, 71 L.Ed.2d 783 (1982). However, although Vela has highlighted in his brief to this Court a number of trial errors that were not specifically mentioned in his *pro se* state habeas petition, all of these errors support the same constitutional claim urged before the state court, and all were readily discernible from the review of the entire record which that court was obligated to carry out. Characterizing these allegations as "unexhausted claims" would require us to find that the state habeas court failed in its duty to evaluate counsel's performance on the basis of the record as a whole. This we are unwilling to do, given that court's citation in its findings of instances drawn from the record in which counsel performed properly. Concluding as we do that the alleged "new facts" are not new at all, we cannot see how our

consideration of these same facts in any way undercuts the state court, or creates any friction between the state and federal judicial systems. Accordingly, we hold that Vela has exhausted all available state remedies as required by § 2254(b), (c), and move on to an analysis of the merits of his claim.

Standard of Review

[7,8] Although several decisions by this Court suggest that whether a defendant has received effective assistance of counsel is a purely factual question reviewed under the clearly erroneous standard of Fed.R.Civ.Prro. 52(a),⁶ we most recently held in *Washington v. Watkins*, 655 F.2d 1346 (5th Cir.1981), cert. denied, 456 U.S. 949, 102 S.Ct. 2021, 72 L.Ed.2d 474 (1982) that:

Whether a defendant has enjoyed effective assistance of counsel is a mixed question of fact and law. While subsidiary findings of basic, historical fact that the district court has made

6. See, e.g., *United States v. Hughes*, 635 F.2d 449, 451, 453 (5th Cir.1981); *Pollinzi v. Estelle*, 628 F.2d 417, 418 (5th Cir.1980) (per curiam); *Brown v. Blackburn*, 625 F.2d 35, 36 (1980); *Jones v. Wainwright*, 604 F.2d 414, 416-18 (5th Cir.1979) (per curiam). But see *Harris v. Oliver*, 645 F.2d 327, 330 n. 3 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 454 U.S. 1109, 102 S.Ct. 687, 70 L.Ed.2d 650 (1981); *Norris v. Wainwright*, 588 F.2d 130, 134-35 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 444 U.S. 846, 100 S.Ct. 93, 62 L.Ed.2d 60 (1979); *United States v. Gray*, 565 F.2d 881, 887 & n. 18 (5th Cir.), cert. denied 435 U.S. 955, 98 S.Ct. 1587, 55 L.Ed.2d 807 (1978); *Trahan v. Estelle*, 544 F.2d 1305, 1314 (5th Cir.1977) (Goldberg, J., specially concurring); *Mason v. Balcom*, 531 F.2d 717, 721-23 (5th Cir.1976); *Lee v. Hopper*, 499 F.2d 456, 462 (5th Cir.), cert. denied, 419 U.S. 1053, 95 S.Ct. 633, 42 L.Ed.2d 650 (1974), all of which determined that counsel's effectiveness was a mixed question of fact and law.

after it has conducted an evidentiary hearing are subject to review under the clearly erroneous standard of Rule 52(a), the district court's ultimate conclusion as to whether the defendant enjoyed effective assistance of counsel is not subject to review under that standard, and the court of appeals must make an independent evaluation based on those subsidiary findings in determining whether counsel's representation satisfied the qualitative, normative standards dictated by the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution.

Watkins, 655 F.2d at 1354. We have since *Watkins* implicitly recognized this standard in *Ware v. King*, 694 F.2d 89, 92 (5th Cir. 1982), *cert. denied*, 461 U.S. ___, 103 S.Ct. 2092, 75 L.Ed.2d ___ (1983), and applied it explicitly in *Baty v. Balkcom*, 661 F.2d 391, 394 n. 7 (5th Cir. Unit B 1981), *cert. denied*, 456 U.S. 1011, 102 S.Ct. 2307, 73 L.Ed.2d 1308 (1982). The Tenth and Eleventh Circuits have recently cited the *Watkins* standard with approval. See, e.g., *Griffin v. Winans*, 684 F.2d 686, 688 (10th Cir. 1982); *Sullivan v. Wainwright*, 695 F.2d 1306, 1308 (11th Cir. 1983); *Proffitt v. Wainwright*, 685 F.2d 1227, 1247 (11th Cir. 1982); *Goodwin v. Balkcom*, 684 F.2d 794, 803 (11th Cir. 1982), *cert. denied*, ___ U.S. ___, 103 S.Ct. 1798, 75 L.Ed.2d ___ (1983). The Supreme Court in *Cuyler v. Sullivan*, 446 U.S. 335, 100 S.Ct. 1708, 1715, 64 L.Ed.2d 333 (1980) held that the question whether attorneys representing co-defendants engaged in multiple representation in violation of the sixth amendment was a mixed question of law and fact. For these reasons, as well as those set forth in our analysis in *Watkins*, 655 F.2d at 1351-54, we conclude that whether counsel rendered effective assistance is a mixed question of law and fact. We are therefore free to substitute our own judgment for that of the district

court. *Baker v. Metcalfe*, 633 F.2d 1198, 1201 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 451 U.S. 974, 101 S.Ct. 2055, 68 L.Ed.2d 354 (1981).⁷

Ineffective Assistance of Counsel

[9-12] The right to counsel guaranteed by the sixth amendment is a fundamental right, *Argersinger v. Hamlin*, 407 U.S. 25, 92 S.Ct. 2006, 2008-10, 32 L.Ed.2d 530 (1972), and applies through the fourteenth amendment to the states. *Cuyler*, 100 S.Ct. at 1715. This vital component of our judicial system includes within its broad compass the right to a minimal quality of counsel, *Gandy v. Alabama*, 569 F.2d 1318, 1320 (5th Cir.1978), defined as the right to effective assistance of counsel. *McMann v. Richardson*, 397 U.S. 759, 90 S.Ct. 1441, 1449 n. 14, 25 L.Ed.2d 763 (1970). This right is present at every stage of a criminal proceeding where substantial rights of a criminal accused may be affected, and consequently extends to sentencing proceedings in criminal cases. *Mempa v. Ray*, 389 U.S. 128, 88 S.Ct. 254, 257, 19 L.Ed.2d 336 (1967). A plea of guilty does not strip a defendant of his right to effective assistance of counsel. *Woodward v. Beto*, 447 F.2d 103, 104 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 404 U.S. 957, 92 S.Ct. 325, 30 L.Ed.2d 275 (1971).

7. The broad scope of our review does not, of course, extend to the state court's findings of subsidiary fact, which are entitled to a presumption of correctness under 28 U.S.C.A. § 2254(d). *Sumner v. Mata*, 455 U.S. 591, 102 S.Ct. 1303, 1306-07, 71 L.Ed.2d 480 (1982). Here, these subsidiary findings are not in dispute. *See also Goodwin*, 684 F.2d at 804 (acceptance of state court's factual findings does not limit appellate court's examination of state transcript for counsel's errors).

[13] The standard governing counsel's effectiveness under the sixth amendment is a straightforward one.

In this circuit, the standard for constitutionally effective assistance of counsel is "not errorless counsel, and not counsel judged ineffective by hindsight, but counsel reasonably likely to render *and rendering* reasonably effective assistance." *Herring v. Estelle*, 491 F.2d 125, 127 (5th Cir.1974) (quoting *MacKenna v. Ellis*, 280 F.2d 592, 599 (5th Cir.1960), *adhered to in pertinent part on rehearing en banc*, 289 F.2d 928 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 368 U.S. 877, 82 S.Ct. 121, 7 L.Ed.2d 78 (1961) (emphasis by *MacKenna* panel)). "[T]he methodology for applying this standard involves an inquiry into the actual performance of counsel conducting the defense and a determination of whether reasonably effective assistance was rendered based on the *totality* of circumstances in the entire record." *Washington v. Estelle*, 648 F.2d 276, 279 (5th Cir.) [*cert. denied*, 454 U.S. 899, 102 S.Ct. 402, 70 L.Ed.2d 216 (1981)] (emphasis in original).

Watkins, 655 F.2d at 1355. See also *Baldwin v. Maggio*, 704 F.2d 1325, 1329 (5th Cir.1983); *Ross v. Estelle*, 694 F.2d 1008, 1012 (5th Cir.1983). Although *Watkins* was a death penalty case, the same standard applies in imprisonment cases. See *Hardin v. Wainwright*, 678 F.2d 589, 592 (5th Cir.1982); *Daniels v. Maggio*, 669 F.2d 1075, 1077 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied*, ____ U.S.____, 103 S.Ct. 295, 74 L.Ed.2d 278 (1982).

We begin our consideration of counsel's performance at trial by examining the Texas Court of Criminal Appeal's decision denying Vela's appeal. *Vela v. State*, 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex.Ct.Cr.App.1974).

[14] In his appeal, Vela objected to the admission of testimony by Harvey Martin as to Brown's good character. Martin, a well-known professional football player, testified that Brown was a man of kind and inoffensive character, that he had never seen Brown get in a fight, and that Brown intended upon his graduation from college to go into social work with children. Because Vela never sought to justify murdering Brown, but pleaded guilty to the charge, and because the record contained no evidence of any threat by Brown against Vela before the dispute erupted, nor any evidence portraying Brown as a violent or dangerous person, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals concluded that Martin's testimony was improperly admitted. Unfortunately, counsel made only a general objection to the admission of this testimony, failing to preserve the error for review.

Although it was error to admit such prejudicial testimony, the appellant has waived the right to complain on appeal for failure to make the proper specific objection. From the record, the only objection made in the trial court was that the testimony was irrelevant, immaterial, and inflammatory. This objection was made prior to any testimony actually given. At no time did appellant ever make an objection to this testimony on the grounds that it was improper character evidence; nor was any motion to strike such testimony as being irrelevant made after the witness testified.

A general objection preserves nothing for review and is not sufficient to apprise the trial court of the complaint urged. *It is a long established rule that an objection to the admission of evidence must be specific and must state*

the grounds of the objection. Failing to meet this requirement, such a general objection will not be considered for review by this Court.

Vela, 516 S.W.2d at 178 (emphasis added) (citations omitted). Counsel's error here was fundamental, revealing ignorance of one of the most basic rules of Texas procedure; an objection must be specific to preserve the error for review.

[15] In his direct appeal, Vela also argued that the admission of Mrs. Brown's testimony constituted reversible error. We reproduce below the Court of Criminal Appeals' disposition of that claim.

From a close examination of [Mrs. Brown's] testimony, it is apparent that it was completely irrelevant, immaterial, and prejudicial. She testified that she had one child, age three, and that the deceased at the time of his death was working at two jobs, attending college, and playing on the championship football team. She also testified that he had aspirations to play professional football, sang in the church choir, was an usher in the church, and was a social worker for an organization benefitting the underprivileged children of all races. *There can be no doubt that this testimony had no bearing whatsoever on any material issue in the case and its sole purpose was to inflame the minds of the jury.* The State, by its own concession, admits that it was not even intended to be good character evidence of the deceased. This Court has consistently held evidence of this type to be inadmissible.

Even though the prejudicial evidence admitted through Mrs. Brown's testimony is *far more prejudicial than any case cited above*, all except

the portion dealing with the deceased's church and social activities was admitted in other testimony without objection from appellant. This Court has held that admission of improper evidence is not reversible error if the same facts are proven by other testimony not objected to.... The remaining portion of her testimony which was not proven from other unobjectionable testimony, standing alone, does not rise to sufficient magnitude to warrant a reversal... Appellant's second ground of error is overruled.

Vela, 516 S.W.2d at 179 (emphasis added) (citations omitted). Although the court did not reach the reversible error issue, we note that it did state in dictum that the testimony admitted was far more prejudicial than that found in any of the cases cited.⁸ Defendants' convictions were reversed in several of those cases. See

8. The cases cited as involving testimony less prejudicial than that in the present case were: *Chism v. State*, 470 S.W.2d 673 (Tex.Cr.App. 1971) (not reversible error to admit testimony of deceased's peaceable character where opposite has been testified to on behalf of defense, and no timely objection made); *Whan v. State*, 438 S.W.2d 918 (Tex.Cr.App.1969) *rev'd on other grounds*, 403 U.S. 946, 91 S.Ct. 2281, 29 L.Ed.2d 856 (1971) (not reversible error to allow crippled wife of deceased to testify without first allowing defense counsel to perfect a bill of exception); *Salazar v. State*, 397 S.W.2d 220 (Tex.Cr.App.1965) (admission of testimony that deceased was the father of eight children not reversible error where objection not timely made); *Cadenhead v. State*, 369 S.W.2d 44 (Tex.Cr.App.1963) (reversible error to admit testimony by mother of deceased that he was sole support of her and her husband); *Orozco v. State*, 164 Tex.Cr.R. 630, 301 S.W.2d 634 (1957) (admission of testimony by deceased's widow as to number and ages of her children not reversible error because same facts proved by evidence not objected to); *Cavarrubio v. State*, 160 Tex.Cr.R. 40, 267 S.W.2d 417 (1954) (admission of testimony that deceased had a wife and two small children insufficiently prejudicial in light of other evidence to constitute reversible error); *Eckels v. State*, 153 Tex.Cr.R. 402, 220

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Cadenhead, Elizondo, Ainsworth, Faulkner, supra note 8. In the great majority of the remaining eight cases in which the court, for one reason or another, failed to reach the question of reversible error, it nevertheless found the evidence inadmissible. We agree with the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals that Mrs. Brown's testimony surpasses comparable testimony in all of the cases cited, both in its irrelevance, and its prejudicial effect. However, the question whether this testimony constituted reversible error in our case is not before us, and we need not decide it. We note only that counsel's error here was fundamental. The evidence in question was admitted solely for the purpose of inflaming the

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S.W.2d 175 (1949) (although it was error to admit testimony that deceased had a wife and five children aged nine months to fourteen years, it was not reversible error where defendant himself elicited similar testimony on cross-examination); *Elizondo v. State*, 130 Tex.Cr.R. 393, 94 S.W.2d 457 (1936) (prosecutor asked defendant: "How many children did you make orphans when you killed [decedent]?" and introduced evidence that the decedent had two children. Prosecutor then asked witness whether defendant was known as a dangerous man in those parts, and whether witness knew that defendant had shot a number of men. Both questions were held to constitute reversible error.); *Ainsworth v. State*, 122 Tex.Cr.R. 483, 56 S.W.2d 457 (1933) (reversible error to allow son of deceased to testify that his mother was left with eight children aged six months to eighteen years, and that they were poverty-stricken and had to pick cotton for a living); *Goolsby v. State*, 112 Tex.Cr.R. 216, 15 S.W.2d 1052 (1929) (testimony that deceased's wife and baby left without support as a result of defendant's act inadmissible, and led jury to enhance punishment, however not reversible error where substantially the same testimony was later given without objection); *Allen v. State*, 102 Tex.Cr.R. 441, 278 S.W. 201 (1925) (admission of testimony that deceased left behind wife and five children aged six to sixteen irrelevant and immaterial, and calculated solely to arouse jury's sympathy and prejudice them against defendant; remanded for new trial on other grounds); *Faulkner v. State*, 43 Tex.Cr.R. 441, 65 S.W. 1093 (1901) (admission of testimony as to number and ages of deceased's children reversible error, since it was solely intended to excite the sympathy of the jury and prejudice them against defendant).

jury. The state itself admitted that it was not intended to be good character evidence of the deceased. Counsel's failure to object to similar testimony later in the trial had the same effect for purposes of subsequent review as would a failure to object to this testimony, and was just as serious.

Vela's third point of error alleged that the prosecutor's jury argument was essentially an appeal to emotion, and was therefore improper. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals did not reach this ground of error because counsel failed to specifically object that the argument was outside the record and inflammatory, but instead simply moved for a mistrial. The court noted in dictum that since an instruction to the jury to disregard would have been sufficient to cure the alleged error, a motion for a mistrial was inappropriate. Counsel's error here therefore does not appear quite as serious as the first two errors we have examined, since the jury would have heard the improper appeal anyway. The fact remains, however, that because of counsel's error, no curative instruction was given.

Quite apart from any prejudice Vela may have suffered as a result of these errors, an issue we address *infra*, it is clear that in each of these instances, counsel failed to do what reasonably should be expected of every Texas attorney representing criminal defendants. He did not follow the most elementary of blackletter rules of procedure found in bar review materials, beginner trial manuals and basic books on Texas procedure: (1) avoid general objections; (2) specify the particular ground of an objection; and (3) move to strike the improper testimony and ask for an appropriate instruction, or, when appropriate, a mistrial.⁹

9. J. Bobo, *Advanced Criminal Law Course, Problems for Criminal Law Practitioners and Effective Assistance of Counsel* F-16 (1981) (Professional Development Program, State Bar of [footnote continued on following page])

Counsel failed to follow these rules on numerous other occasions, and committed several other serious errors as well. When counsel saw fit to make an objection, he did not insist on a ruling to preserve the point. On at least four occasions counsel's hearsay objection was made only after the jury had heard the question answered. He failed to object to the improper and prejudicial testimony of William Berry, establishing Brown's good character, much as he had done when the prosecutor examined Harvey Martin. Counsel missed numerous objections regarding evidentiary foundations, leading questions, hearsay, improper summation of testimony, questions assuming facts not in evidence, and relevancy. On at least four occasions, the court had to intervene and do counsel's job for him. In his cross-examination of the State's witnesses, counsel asked trivial questions, and actually bolstered their testimony. In his defense presentation, counsel spent most of his time trying to convince the sentencing jury, which had just heard Vela plead guilty to murder, that Vela enjoyed a good reputation for being peaceable and law-abiding, despite what the magistrate called "uncontroverted testimony which precluded any theory of justifiable homicide." Some of the same witnesses who

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Texas); S. Clinton, *Criminal Practice Update—Ethical and Effective Counsel* 8-14 (1981) (Lubbock Criminal Defense Lawyers Association); 2 D. Crump, *Advanced Criminal Law Course, Opening Statements and Jury Arguments* Y-14, Y-15 (1981) (Professional Development Program State Bar of Texas); W. Dorsaneo & D. Crump, *Texas Civil Procedure: Trial and Appellate Practice* 70-74, 80, 81 (1981); W. Finkelstein, *Texas Bar Review—Texas Civil Procedure* 39-43 (1981); W. Finkelstein, *Texas Bar Review—Texas Criminal Procedure* 39-40 (1981); P. McLung, *Lawyers Handbook for Texas Criminal Practice* 89-93, 412-14 (rev. ed. 1982); A. McColl, *Criminal Practice Update Extraneous Offenses* (1982) (Lubbock Criminal Defense Lawyers Association); *Texas Bar Review, B.R.I. Bar Review—Texas Criminal Procedure* 16 (1982).

testified to Vela's peaceable nature also testified to his rage at the time of the murder. When Vela himself took the stand, his lack of preparation became immediately evident. At one point, he actually volunteered the information that he expected to receive a life sentence. The prosecutor had a field day with Vela.¹⁰

[16] "The sentencing stage of any case, regardless of the potential punishment, is 'the time at which for many defendants the most important services of the entire proceeding can be performed.'" *Stanley v. Zant*, 697 F.2d 955, 963 (11th Cir.1983) (citations omitted). Where the potential punishment is 99 years imprisonment, the sentencing proceeding takes on added importance. While the legal standard of effective representation does not change from case to case, this does not mean that the severity of the sentence faced by a criminal defendant should not be considered in determining whether counsel's performance meets this standard. *Watkins*, 655 F.2d at 1356. "[T]he number, nature, and seriousness of the charges against the defendant are all part of the 'totality of the circumstances in the entire record' that must be considered in the effective assistance calculus." *Id.* See *Stanley*, 697 F.2d at 962-63. Here, Vela was charged with perhaps the most serious of offenses; murder. "Unless a defendant charged with a serious offense has counsel able to invoke the

10. Q (By Mr. Prather) [State's attorney] Basically what you want this jury to do is give you a little ol' two years in the penitentiary for taking a man's life, is that right?

A No, I don't want them to do that because I know I am not going to get two years.

THE COURT: Let's hurry along, counsel.

A I know what the sentence is going to be.

Q What is it going to be?

A Probably life.

MR. PRATHER: Pass the witness.

procedural and substantive safeguards that distinguish our system of justice, a serious risk of injustice infects the trial itself." *Cuyler*, 100 S.Ct. at 1715.

[17] Vela does not claim that he was denied counsel reasonably likely to render effective assistance, rather, he claims that he was denied counsel *rendering* effective assistance. Accordingly, we evaluate counsel's performance "from the perspective of counsel, taking into account all of the circumstances of the case, but only as those circumstances were known to him at the time in question." *Watkins*, 655 F.2d at 1356. Here, we do not judge counsel's performance with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, secure in the possession of new evidence which, had it been known to counsel, would have caused him to act differently. We assess his performance on the basis of the facts known to him, and the rules of law and procedure he is held to know as an attorney representing defendants in criminal proceedings.

[18,19] It is Vela, of course, who bears the burden of proving ineffective assistance of counsel by a preponderance of the evidence. *Hayes v. Maggio*, 699 F.2d 198, 201-02 (5th Cir.1983); *Washington v. Strickland*, 693 F.2d 1243, 1250 (5th Cir. Unit B. 1982) (*en banc*), *cert. granted*, 462 U.S. ___, 103 S.Ct. ___, 75 L.Ed.2d ___ (1983); *Ward v. United States*, 694 F.2d 654, 664 (11th Cir.1983); *Adams v. Balkcom*, 688 F.2d 734, 738 (11th Cir.1982). In some cases, a single critical error may render counsel's performance constitutionally defective. *Nero v. Blackburn*, 597 F.2d 991, 994 (5th Cir.1979).

[20] Here, Vela has identified not one error, but many, several of which were sufficiently grave to preclude the review of serious claims on direct appeal. We find that Vela has met his burden, and conclude that counsel's performance in this proceeding fell below the range of competency generally demanded of attorneys in

criminal cases. *Young v. Zant*, 677 F.2d 792 at 798 (11th Cir. 1982). Assessing counsel's performance on the basis of the totality of the record, we hold that counsel in this proceeding did not render reasonably effective assistance.

Actual and Substantial Disadvantage

This does not, of course, complete our inquiry. In *Strickland*, we stated that once it is determined that defendant's right to effective assistance of counsel was violated, a court

should then separately determine whether petitioner suffered prejudice of sufficient magnitude to warrant granting the writ of habeas corpus. We decide that the petitioner has the burden of persuasion to demonstrate that the ineffective assistance created not only "a *possibility* of prejudice, but that [it] worked to his *actual* and substantial disadvantage." If he successfully satisfies this burden, the writ must be granted unless the state proves that counsel's ineffectiveness was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt.

Strickland, 693 F.2d at 1258 (citations omitted) (emphasis in original). In *Strickland*, the *en banc* Court rejected a *per se* rule of prejudice in ineffective assistance of counsel cases. It also rejected an outcome-determinative test as setting too high a standard, and refused to adopt the rule proposed by the panel majority, whereby petitioner had only to show that but for counsel's ineffectiveness the trial, but not necessarily its outcome, would have been altered in a way helpful to the defense. *Id.* at 1260-62.

Vela pled guilty to murder. The jury was given the broadest range of punishment options, from two years to life. Defense counsel allowed the State to introduce

evidence on an issue that the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals concluded "was not presented." *Vela*, 516 S.W.2d at 178. Defense counsel allowed the State to encourage the jury to set punishment based on the goodness of the murder victim. Under the Texas rules governing trial procedure, evidence of this type is inadmissible precisely because of its prejudicial effect. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals characterized Mrs. Brown's testimony as "completely irrelevant, immaterial and prejudicial," concluding that "[t]here can be no doubt that this testimony had no bearing whatsoever on any material issue in the case and its sole purpose was to inflame the minds of the jury." *Vela*, 516 F.2d at 179. The court also found this evidence to be far more prejudicial than comparable evidence in any of the twelve Texas cases it examined.

[21] *Vela* was thrice prejudiced. First, defense counsel allowed the prejudicial evidence on Brown's good character to be introduced. Second, by failing to object to it and ask for a curative instruction, counsel allowed the jury to consider it as if it had been material, probative evidence, relevant to the issue of *Vela*'s sentence. Third, defense counsel's failure to object waived the issue for consideration on direct appeal. We have no difficulty concluding that counsel's ineffectiveness "resulted in actual and substantial disadvantage to the cause of [Vela's] defense." *Strickland*, 693 F.2d at 1262. Indeed, given the extremely prejudicial effect of this testimony, we fail to see how anyone could conclude otherwise. Faced with the task of assessing *Vela*'s punishment, the jury was informed that the man he had killed was kind, inoffensive, a star athlete, an usher in his church, a member of its choir, a social worker with under-privileged children of all races, a college student holding down two jobs while he attended classes and played on the championship football team,

and the father of a three-year-old child. The truth of these statements is, of course, not in issue; the point is that they are irrelevant to the severity of Vela's sentence, and should not have been considered by the jury.

Harmless Error

[22,23] The State has failed to carry its burden of showing that the admission of this testimony was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18, 87 S.Ct. 824, 828, 17 L.Ed.2d 705 (1967). It is not enough to say that since the jury *could* have assessed a life sentence without having heard the prejudicial testimony, the admission of this testimony was harmless. The State dropped a skunk into the jury box. Defense counsel made no serious effort to either identify it as a skunk, have it removed, or have the jury instructed to disregard its presence. We cannot in reason conclude that the jury did not consider this inadmissible, improper, highly prejudicial testimony in determining Vela's sentence. The sentencing process consists of weighing mitigating and aggravating factors, and making adjustments in the severity of the sentence consistent with this calculus. Each item of testimony has an incremental effect; large segments of highly prejudicial, inadmissible testimony have a considerable effect, skewing the calculus and invalidating the result reached.

[24] Under Texas law, where the jury assesses punishment, an appellate court may not reverse and remand solely for a reassessment of punishment. *Ex parte Brown*, 575 S.W.2d 517, 518 (Tex.Cr.App. 1979). Rather, petitioner is entitled to a new trial on the issue of guilt as well as punishment. *Ex parte Elizalde*, 594 S.W.2d 105, 106 (Tex.Cr.App.1980) (en banc).

Accordingly, we REVERSE the district court's judgment and REMAND with instructions to grant the writ of habeas corpus unless the State elects within a reasonable time to retry Vela. *McDonald v. Estelle*, 536 F.2d 667, 672 (5th Cir.1976), *vacated on other grounds*, 433 U.S. 904, 97 S.Ct. 2967, 53 L.Ed.2d 1088 (1977).

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NO. 83-506
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CLERK

IN THE
UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT
OCTOBER TERM, 1982

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,
Petitioner
V.

CONRADO VELA,
Respondent

Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court Of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

SUPPLEMENTAL APPENDICES

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APPENDIX C

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION

CONRADO VELA

§
§
§
§
§
§

v.

CA3-81-2022-R

W. J. ESTELLE,
DIRECTOR, TDC

JUDGMENT

This action came on for consideration by the Court, and the issues having been duly considered and a decision duly rendered,

It is ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that the Petitioner's application be, and it is hereby, refused and dismissed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk shall transmit a true copy of this order and the order adopting the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendation of the United States Magistrate, to Petitioner and Respondent.

SIGNED AND ENTERED this 8th day of April, 1982.

/s/

UNITED STATES
DISTRICT JUDGE

APPENDIX D

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION

CONRADO VELA	§	
	§	
V.	§	CA3-81-2022-R
	§	
W. J. ESTELLE, DIRECTOR, TDC	§	
	§	

ORDER

After making an independent review of the pleadings, files and records in this case, and the findings, conclusions and recommendation of the United States Magistrate, I am of the opinion that the findings and conclusions of the Magistrate are correct and they are adopted as the findings and conclusions of the Court.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED that the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendation of the United States Magistrate, are adopted.

SIGNED AND ENTERED this 8th day of April, 1982.

/s/

UNITED STATES
DISTRICT JUDGE

APPENDIX E

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS DALLAS DIVISION

CONRADO VELA	§	
	§	
V.	§	CA3-81-2022-R
	§	
W. J. ESTELLE, DIRECTOR, TDC	§	
	§	

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE

Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. 636(b), and an Order of the Court in implementation thereof, the subject cause has previously been referred to the United States Magistrate. The findings, conclusions and recommendation of the Magistrate, as evidenced by his signature thereto, are as follows:

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Type Case:

This is a petition for habeas corpus relief filed by a State inmate pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §2254.

Parties:

Petitioner is confined as an inmate at the Ramsey Unit No. 1 of the Texas Department of Corrections at Oney, Texas, serving a conviction for the offense of murder.

Respondent is the Director of the Texas Department of Corrections.

Statement of the Case:

After the prosecution filed its written intention not to seek the death penalty (Record, Volume 1, page 11), the Petitioner entered a plea of guilty to the charge of murder pursuant to the indictment returned in Cause No. C-73-7226-JL after a jury had been impanelled to assess punishment. The prosecution and the Petitioner put on evidence during the punishment phase and the jury thereafter found the Petitioner guilty of murder with malice and assessed his punishment at a term of 99 years confinement in the Texas Department of Corrections. The Petitioner effected a direct appeal, and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals affirmed the conviction in *Vela v. State*, 516 S.W.2d 177 (Tx.Crim.App. 1974). Petitioner has filed one subsequent application for habeas corpus relief in the courts of the State of Texas pursuant to Article 11.07, Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, which was denied by the Court of Criminal Appeals on June 4, 1980.

In his present application the Petitioner alleges that he was denied effective assistance of counsel in violation of the Sixth Amendment by reason of this trial attorney's failure to properly object to: (1) the testimony of the deceased's widow, Mrs. Carolyn Brown; (2) the testimony of Harvey Othel Martin; and (3) the prosecution's closing argument in the punishment phase of Petitioner's trial.

The Respondent has filed his Answer and Motion to Dismiss wherein he admits that the Petitioner has exhausted available State remedies.

Findings and Conclusions:

The present application must be viewed solely in context of the Petitioner's trial counsel's conduct since this is the only constitutional issue which has been presented

to the Texas State courts, and thus has satisfied the exhaustion prerequisite of §2254, although clearly in considering this issue counsel's conduct must be viewed in the context of the case as a whole.

Since the Petitioner has called into the question the conduct of his counsel during the course of the Petitioner's trial for murder, this court has carefully reviewed the entire trial proceedings, including the testimony of witnesses called by the prosecution as well as those called on behalf of the Petitioner. The evidence supporting the Petitioner's conviction is accurately set out in summary fashion in the Court of Criminal Appeals' opinion affirming the Petitioner's conviction. However, it is pertinent to make several additional observations on the conduct of the Petitioner's trial attorney. Initially it is observed that the State elected not to seek the death penalty for the homicide committed by the Petitioner. Further, during the course of cross examining the State's witnesses, counsel elicited testimony showing that the deceased's co-employee tried to dissuade the deceased from following the Petitioner's brother into the parking lot where the initial confrontation occurred (Statement of Facts, testimony of William Berry, page 59; 63). The attorney also established that the Petitioner was unarmed and was cooperative at the time of his arrest (Id, testimony of John Hester, pages 84-85). In the course of the Petitioner's case in chief his attorney called five witnesses in addition to the Petitioner himself. In the face of the uncontested testimony which precluded any theory of justifiable homicide, counsel attempted to show that the Petitioner enjoyed a good reputation for being a peaceable and law-abiding citizen. The Petitioner's witnesses also testified that the Petitioner had become extremely angry as a result of being struck by the decedent at the time of the initial altercation, and that his actions from that point forward resulted from his extreme anger. The Petitioner's mental state was presented in an effort to convince the jury that it should

limit its finding to murder without malice. The fact that counsel was unable to so persuade the jury does not undermine the fact that counsel presented Petitioner's case in the most favorable light possible.

It should also be observed that counsel elicited testimony tending to neutralize the possibility that any shots were fired shortly before the Petitioner's arrest was effected by showing that on the day prior to the Fourth of July children in the area were shooting off firecrackers.

The factual context on which the Petitioner's claims of ineffective assistance of counsel are predicated provided the factual bases for the Petitioner's points of error in his direct appeal. The record from Petitioner's trial reflects that the testimony of Mrs. Brown and Mr. Martin were not received without protest on the part of Petitioner's counsel. The record reflects that counsel sought a voir dire examination of each of these witnesses before their testimony was presented by the prosecution, and that on each occasion the trial judge denied the request (Statement of Facts, pages 122-123; 178-179). Further, in response to the prosecutor's argument which constitutes the third prong of the Petitioner's claim of ineffective assistance of counsel, the trial attorney asked for a mistrial (Id, page 254).

In its opinion affirming the Petitioner's conviction the Court of Criminal Appeals ruled that counsel's objections and motion for mistrial were insufficient to preserve error for appellate review. Therefore, the inquiry before this court is whether the three inartful attempts by the Petitioner's trial counsel to preserve error for appellate review rendered counsel's representation of Petitioner as a whole constitutionally infirm.

In assaying whether counsel's conduct falls below minimum constitutional standards, his actual perfor

mance, considered in the light of the totality of the circumstances in the case must be shown to have been seriously inadequate and that such inadequacy unduly and unfairly prejudiced Petitioner's trial to the extent that the trial as a whole was rendered "fundamentally unfair". *Boyd v. Estelle*, 661 F.2d 388 (5th Cir. 1981); *Washington v. Watkins*, 655 F.2d 1346, 1360 (5th Cir. 1981); *Nelson v. Estelle*, 642 F.2d 903, 906 (5th Cir. 1981). These inquiries are separate and distinct, and the Petitioner bears the burden of demonstrating both in order to be entitled to relief. A review of counsel's conduct as a whole demonstrates that but for these three isolated instances which the Petitioner now asserts, his trial attorney cross examined State witnesses in a competent manner, presented testimony in an effort to obtain a verdict of murder without malice and presented a reasonable and cogent argument on the Petitioner's behalf. Thus counsel's efforts as a whole strongly militate against a finding of a Sixth Amendment violation. The case decisions of the Fifth Circuit demonstrate that the court has been loathe to grant relief based upon isolated instances of error. See *Nelson v. Estelle*, *supra*, at page 906.

The decisional law of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals has historically held that the State in the first instance may not offer evidence that the decedent was peaceable and inoffensive, nor may the State offer testimony concerning the decedent's marital status and personal history. See *Vela v. State*, *supra*, at pages 178-179 and cases cited therein.¹ With the exception of

1. Quite frankly this court has difficult in comprehending the policy reasons for such a rule of law where such evidence is presented in the punishment phase of trial. It seems to me imminently appropriate that the assessment of punishment should be made with knowledge of the circumstances of the killing and the background of both the decedant and the defendant. It cannot be denied that the Petitioner attempted and was permitted to put his
(footnote continued on following page)

the decision in *Arthur v. State*, 339 S.W.2d 538 (Tx.Crim.App. 1960), erroneous admission of evidence concerning the deceased's character has not mandated reversal of a conviction. E.g. *Cavarrubio v. State*, 267 S.W.2d 417 (Tx.Crim.App. 1954); *Whan v. State*, 438 S.W.2d 918, concurring opinion at page 924 (Tex.Crim.App. 1969). Thus, it is far from clear, unlike the error complained of in *Nero v. Blackburn*, 597 F.2d 991 (5th Cir. 1979), that even had counsel properly preserved error for appellate review on these grounds that such error would have been sufficient to obtain a reversal of his conviction.

Concerning the comments made by the prosecutor of which the Petitioner now complains (Statement of Facts, page 254, lines 2-7), although the Court of Criminal Appeals declined to consider the merits of such alleged error, it appears that no error occurred. In cases decided by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals addressing the propriety of the prosecution's argument relative to the effect of a crime on victims or members of a victim's family, the conduct proscribed is the injection of matters which are not in the record. More particularly comments which have been found to be improper are those wherein the prosecutor sought to infer that a victim or his family "wished" a certain punishment to be imposed. In the context of the Petitioner's case the prosecutor's comments constituted nothing more than an articulation of facts which were known to the jurors, particularly in light of the fact that the decedent's wife had testified as a witness. Even if the comments of the prosecutor be considered to be erroneous, under Texas

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"best foot forward" in the eyes of the jury, including his family background and past work history. Unless testimony concerning the deceased is presented under circumstances and in a manner wholly calculated to inflame the jury, it would seem that such evidence is also relevant to the jury's determination of a proper punishment.

State law they could hardly be said to mandate reversal in the face of other cases in which the Court of Criminal Appeals has held no reversible error occurred where far more blatant and inflammatory statements were made cured only by an instruction from the trial judge, e.g. *Culley v. State*, 505 S.W.2d 564 (Tx.Crim.App. 1974); *Cherry v. State*, 488 S.W.2d 744 (Tx.Crim.App. 1972) cert. den. 411 U.S. 909; *James v. State*, 240 S.W.2d 771 (Tx.Crim.App. 1951).

Taken as a whole Petitioner's trial attorney more than adequately represented the Petitioner. The isolated instances to which the Petitioner points are not of such magnitude to render counsel's conduct constitutionally infirm.

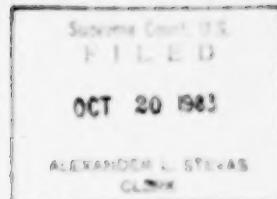
Alternatively, even if these cited actions of counsel can be said to be seriously inadequate under the Fifth Circuit's standards, the Petitioner cannot demonstrate that these inadequacies render the Petitioner's trial as a whole "fundamentally unfair". As further elaborated above, the evidence against the Petitioner was overwhelming. It is undoubtably for this reason that he entered a plea of guilty. Additionally, it is noted that the Petitioner himself admitted on cross examination that he anticipated that the jury would assess a life sentence (Statement of Facts, page 207). Although a term of 99 years is a very substantial sentence, in the face of evidence which established that the Petitioner shot at the decedant, who was unarmed at the time, approximately six or seven times, and struck the decedant with a fatal wound in the back, such a sentence is clearly not unjustified, particular in the light of the fact that during the same time period the Petitioner's criminal trial occurred it was not infrequent for Dallas County juries to assess punishment at terms of years in excess of 1000 years. E.g. *Culley v. State*, supra, wherein the punishment for murder with malice was set at a term of 3000 years imprisonment.

RECOMMENDATION

For the foregoing reasons it is recommended that the Petitioner's application be denied and dismissed.

/s/

UNITED STATES
DISTRICT JUDGE



NO. 83-506

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

H. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONRADO U. VELA,

Respondent

On Petition For Writ of Certiorari
To The United States Court of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

BRIEF OF RESPONDENT IN OPPOSITION

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

II. WHETHER THE CONTROLLING ISSUE OF DEFENSE COUNSEL'S INEFFECTIVENESS WAS FAIRLY PRESENTED TO, AND FULLY CONSIDERED BY, THE STATE HABEAS COURT SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENT OF EXHAUSTION OF STATE REMEDIES?

III. WHETHER THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE PROHIBITS A STATE PRISONER FROM URGING HIS DEFENSE COUNSEL WAS INEFFECTIVE, IN PART, BECAUSE COUNSEL'S FAILURE TO OBJECT ADEQUATELY DID NOT PRESERVE THE ERROR FOR STATE APPEAL AND EXPOSED THE SENTENCING JURY TO "COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT, IMMATERIAL, AND PREJUDICIAL" EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT CONCERNING THE GOOD CHARACTER OF THE VICTIM?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
QUESTIONS PRESENTED	1
TABLE OF AUTHORITIES.	iii
STATEMENT OF THE CASE	
A. Course of Proceedings and Disposition Below	1
B. Statement of Facts.	4
SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT	5
REASONS WHY THE WRIT SHOULD BE DENIED	6
I. THE CONTROLLING ISSUE OF DEFENSE COUNSEL'S INEFFECTIVENESS WAS FAIRLY PRESENTED TO, AND FULLY CONSIDERED BY, THE STATE HABEAS COURT, SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENT OF EXHAUSTION OF STATE REMEDIES	6
II. THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE DOES NOT PROHIBIT A STATE PRISONER FROM URGING HIS DEFENSE COUNSEL WAS INEFFECTIVE, IN PART, BECAUSE COUNSEL'S FAILURE TO OBJECT ADEQUATELY DID NOT PRESERVE THE ERRORS FOR STATE APPEAL AND EXPOSED THE SEN- TENCING JURY TO "COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT, IMMATERIAL, AND PREJUDICIAL" EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT CONCERNING THE GOOD CHARACTER OF THE VICTIM	9
CONCLUSION.	11

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

<u>Cases</u>	<u>Page</u>
Anderson v. Harless, 103 S.Ct. 276 (1982)	8, 11
Braig v. MacDonald, 454 U.S. 364 (1982)	11
Duckworth v. Serrano, 454 U.S. 1 (1982)	8
Engle v. Isaac, 456 U.S. 107 (1982)	9
Francis v. Henderson, 425 U.S. 536 (1976)	11
Martin v. Maggio, 711 F.2d 1273 (5th Cir. 1983)	6
Picard v. Connor, 404 U.S. 270 (1971)	8
Pritchess v. Davis, 421 U.S. 482 (1975)	8
Smith v. Digmon, 434 U.S. 332 (1978)	8
Smith v. Coguen, 415 U.S. 566 (1974)	9
United States v. Prady, 456 U.S. 152 (1982)	10
United States v. Johnson, 457 U.S. 537 (1982)	7
Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d 954 (5th Cir.), <u>reh'g and en banc reh'g denied, F.2d</u> (August 23, 1983)	1, 3, 7
Vela v. State, 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex. Crim. App. 1974)	2, 9, 10
Weirwright v. Sykes, 433 U.S. 72 (1977)	9, 11
Washington v. Strickland, 693 F.2d 1243 (5th Cir. 1982) (Unit B en banc), <u>cert. granted, 103 S.Ct. 2451 (1983)</u>	7, 10
<u>Constitution, Statutes, and Rules</u>	
U.S. Const. amend. VI	passim
U.S. Const. amend. XIV.	passim
28 U.S.C. § 2254 (Supp. V 1981)	3

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES (Cont.)

	Page
Fed. R. App. R. 35	3
5th Cir. R. 16	3
Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. art. 11.07 (Vernon 1979)	5
 <u>Other Authorities</u>	
Baker, <u>Criminal Procedure</u> , 34 Mercer L.Rev. 1241 (1983)	10
P. Bator, P. Mishkin, D. Shapiro, & H. Wechsler, <u>Hart & Wechsler's The Federal Courts and</u> <u>the Federal System</u> (2d ed. 1973)	8
J. Cook, <u>Constitutional Rights of the Accused --</u> <u>Post-Trial Rights</u> (1976)	8
J. Moore, M. Maxner, M. Eisenstein, S. Allen, A. Menschel, E. Lafferty, & S. Katz, <u>BC Moore's Federal Practice</u> § 14.04 (2d ed. 1982)	8
R. Popper, <u>Post-Conviction Remedies</u> (1978)	8
P. Sokol, <u>Federal Habeas Corpus</u> (2d ed. 1969)	8
Tague, <u>The Attempt to Improve Criminal</u> <u>Defense Representation</u> , 15 Am. Crim. L.Rev. 109 (1977)	10
D. Wilkes, <u>Federal and State Post-Conviction</u> <u>Remedies and Relief</u> (1983)	8
C. Wright, A. Miller, & E. Cooper, <u>Federal</u> <u>Practice and Procedure</u> § 4264 (1978)	8
L. Yackle, <u>Postconviction Remedies</u> (1981)	8

IN THE
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONRAD U. VELA,

Respondent

On Petition For a Writ of Certiorari
To The United States Court of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

BRIEF OF RESPONDENT IN OPPOSITION

Respondent, Corrado U. Vela, respectfully requests that this Court deny the petition for a writ of certiorari, seeking review of the decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d 954 (5th Cir. 1983), rehearing and en banc rehearing denied, ____ F.2d ____ (No. 82-1236, filed August 23, 1983).

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

A. Course of Proceedings and Disposition Below

On October 2, 1973, in the Criminal District Court No. 5 of Dallas County, Texas, Respondent pled guilty to murder and requested that the jury assess punishment (Tr. 5, 10, 17; SF

4-6; Writ. tr. 3, 5).¹ In the somewhat peculiar Texas procedure, the jury had the option of finding Respondent guilty of murder with malice aforethought, which carried a punishment of life or any term of years of imprisonment not less than two years, or murder without malice aforethought, which carried a punishment of not less than two years nor more than five years imprisonment. After hearing evidence and argument, the jury found Respondent guilty of murder with malice and assessed punishment at 99 years confinement (Tr. 15; SF 271-72). Represented by his trial counsel, Respondent took an unsuccessful direct appeal to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, Vela v. State, 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex. Crim. App. 1974). On direct appeal, the state court ruled on each asserted error in much the same way: because the Respondent's attorney had failed to object properly to the prejudicial testimony, other similar testimony, or the prosecutor's improper argument, none of the errors was preserved for review.

Appearing pro se, Respondent applied for state collateral relief on April 10, 1980 (Writ. tr. 9; ROA 5). His petition set out in great detail the factual and legal argument that Respondent had been denied his constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel (Writ. tr. 9-14). The Criminal District Court, the convicting court, made findings of fact and conclusions of law without a hearing and recommended the denial

¹ Record references are as follows. "ROA" refers to the Record on Appeal of Petitioner's federal writ application, District Court Docket Number CA3-81-2022. "Tr." refers to the document transcript from Petitioner's state court prosecution, State Trial Court Cause Number C73-7226-JL, State Appellate Court Cause Number 49, 203. "SF" refers to the upper right page numbers of the transcription of the statement of facts of the state court trial. "Writ tr." refers to the document transcript of the state habeas proceeding, State Trial Court Cause Number W-80-50017-L and State Appellate Court Cause Number 9209.

of all relief (Ex. tr. 20-23). The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals denied the application without written order on June 4, 1980 (Nr. tr. cover).

On November 12, 1981, Respondent pro se applied for federal habeas corpus relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254 (Supp. V 1981) in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Dallas Division (ROA 1-11). Respondent's sole contention was the ground unsuccessfully urged previously in his state habeas corpus proceeding: the denial of his constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel at his 1973 trial. The District Judge adopted the magistrate's findings, conclusions, and recommendation and further refused and dismissed Respondent's application in an order dated April 8, 1983 (ROA 32-33) (Supplemental Appendices C, D, & E). A certificate of probable cause and a timely notice of appeal were filed (ROA 34, 36). After Respondent filed his pro se brief and Petitioner filed a brief in response, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit appointed counsel for Respondent and requested further briefing. Appointed counsel filed a supplemental brief on the same ineffectiveness claim which was raised in the earlier pro se filings.

On July 5, 1983, a panel of the Court of Appeals reversed the judgment of the District Court and, consistent with Texas sentencing law, remanded the cause "with instructions to grant the writ of habeas corpus unless the State elects within a reasonable time to retry Vela" Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d at 966 (Petition for Writ of Certiorari Appendix B at 30-31). On August 23, 1983, the Court of Appeals denied Petitioner's Suggestion of Rehearing En Banc; no member of the panel or judge in regular active service on the court even requested a poll (Petition for Writ of Certiorari Appendix A at 1). See Fed. R. App. P. 35; 5th Cir. R. 16. On September 12, 1983, the

Court of Appeals denied Respondent's request for an indefinite stay of the mandate and entered an order for a conditional stay pending this Court's action on the instant petition. Vela v. Estelle, No. 82-1236 (5th Cir. filed Sept. 12, 1983).

B. Statement of Facts

Petitioner's Statement of Facts is a fairly accurate account of the tragic events surrounding the July 1, 1973, murder (Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 6-7). Respondent never denied the crime and pled guilty to the indictment (Tr. 1, 5, 10, 17; SF 4-6; Wr. tr. 1-5). The only issue which remained for the jury was how much punishment was deserved. The only factual issue raised in this Court concerns exhaustion, and the following facts summarize Respondent's exhaustion of state remedies.

Any concern for exhaustion must consider the context of the state habeas proceeding. Respondent's pro se "Original Post Conviction Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus" filed in the Criminal District Court No. 5 of Dallas County raised the ineffectiveness of counsel claim based on the effect on the entire sentencing proceeding from defense counsel's incompetence (Wr. tr. 9-14). Respondent relied on all the "papers, transcript, statement of the facts and . . . other records of the proceedings" (Wr. tr. 14). The Criminal District Court, the first state habeas court, went beyond the application to make findings of fact and conclusions of law without a hearing, recommending the denial of all relief, Trial Court Number W-80-50017-L (Wr. tr. 20-23). In its recommendation the Criminal District Court evaluated defense counsel's effectiveness on the entire record (Wr. tr. 20). The Criminal District Court rejected the approach of isolating particular defense counsel errors and reviewed defense counsel's performance in its entirety and in context. Even without the

prompting of any response to the state court application, the Criminal District Court went beyond the application and relied on particular positive aspects of defense counsel's performance. In recommending the denial of the application, the Criminal District Court noted defense counsel had made objections, argued to the jury, pursued the appeal, and "performed numerous other functions of a competent and effective trial counsel" (Wr. tr. 21). The transcript and all the papers in the case, along with the convicting court's findings and order, were transmitted to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (Wr. tr. 22). See Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. art. 11.07 (Vernon 1979). The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals denied the application without a written order, apparently adopting the findings and recommendation (Wr. tr. cover). Thus, when the state courts considered and denied the state application, each went beyond the four corners of the state application to consider defense counsel's ineffectiveness on the trial record as a whole and each relied on specific examples of argued effectiveness in disposing of Respondent's sixth and fourteenth amendments claim. The federal habeas corpus proceedings followed at which the same claim of ineffective assistance of counsel was considered.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Petitioner's request for a writ of certiorari is typical of the genre. Petitioner exaggerates the Court of Appeals holding and overstates the importance of the decision below. Here, the state habeas court expressly stated it had reviewed the entire record under a totality-of-the-circumstances analysis of defense counsel's ineffectiveness. The Court of Appeals accepted this as true in finding exhaustion. Thus, the controlling issue of defense counsel's ineffectiveness was fairly presented to, and fully considered by, the state habeas

court. Respondent exhausted the state court remedy.

The doctrine of procedural default has no application here. Since losing on the issue on direct state court appeal, Respondent has never launched an admissibility challenge based on state evidence law, the defaulted issue. Instead, before the state and federal habeas courts Respondent has raised the single issue of ineffective assistance of counsel. Despite Petitioner's best effort to recast the issue, the procedural default doctrine cannot supplant the constitutional guarantee of the effective assistance of counsel.

REASONS WHY THE WRIT SHOULD BE DENIED

I. THE CONTROLLING ISSUE OF DEFENSE COUNSEL'S INEFFECTIVENESS WAS FAIRLY PRESENTED TO, AND FULLY CONSIDERED BY, THE STATE HABEAS COURT, SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENT OF EXHAUSTION OF STATE REMEDIES

Petitioner suggests that the holding below would require that a state habeas court "comb the entire record for any errors of counsel" once an ineffectiveness claim was made and, furthermore, would create a presumption that every conceivable counsel error was considered (Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 11). In some future appeal, Petitioner will not likely so overstate the holding, when appearing as an advocate against issuing the writ. Nor will the Court of Appeals exaggerate the holding in this case.² The true holding is evident

*

² To date, the Court of Appeals has used the Vela v. Estelle holding only once, to reaffirm the entitlement to counsel reasonably likely to render and rendering effective assistance of counsel. Martin v. Maggio, 711 F.2d 1273, 1279 (5th Cir. 1983) (citing Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d 954, 961 (5th Cir. 1983)). In more than three months since the decision, this has been the only use of the Vela precedent. ILEXIS SEARCH, Genfed library, Cases file (October 11, 1983).

from even a cursory reading of the panel opinion and it represents a rather unremarkable application of precedent. Under the totality-of-the-circumstances test of ineffectiveness of counsel,³ the state court exhaustion doctrine is satisfied if: (1) the applicant identifies particular, egregious errors as examples of an overall ineffectiveness; (2) the respondent has the opportunity to go beyond the application to identify incidents of effectiveness; (3) the state court considers these arguments and professes to carry out its own independent analysis of counsel's entire record performance; (4) the state court's findings conclusions and recommendations disclose a thorough state court review of counsel's performance.

Therefore, when the state habeas court expressly states that it has reviewed the entire record under a totality-of-the-circumstances test, and the record demonstrates that the state court has in fact done so, the federal habeas court may consider the issue exhausted. Accurately stated, the holding challenged here requires more by way of exhaustion than this Court's decisions. Even the headnote writer understood the narrowness of the holding below. See 708 F.2d at 954 (Headnote 6) (Petition for Writ of Certiorari Appendix B at 3).

Once Petitioner's exaggeration of the holding below is exposed, the overstatement in the petition of the importance of the case becomes obvious. The panel opinion is merely a consistent and correct application of well-worn precedent. In the leading decision, Picard v. Connor, 404 U.S. 270, 278 (1971), this Court held that "the substance of a federal habeas

³ Petitioner does not here challenge the Court of Appeals' standard of review of counsel's effectiveness. See Washington v. Strickland, 693 F.2d 1243 (5th Cir. 1982) (Unit B En Banc), cert. granted, 103 S. Ct. 2451 (1983). But cf. United States v. Johnson, 457 U.S. 537 (1982) (Retroactivity of constitutional rulings).

corpus claim must first be presented to the state courts." See also id. at 275-76. According to this Court's subsequent decisions and noted commentators, the doctrine of exhaustion requires only that the state courts be provided with a fair opportunity to correct the same claimed constitutional defect later presented to the federal habeas court.⁴ Here, the state habeas court actually reached the merits of the ineffectiveness issue and reviewed the entire record along the way to denying state habeas relief. Granting review in this case now would be a wasteful exercise of this Court's discretionary jurisdiction. This Court should resist Petitioner's efforts to obtain a common law writ of error under the certiorari jurisdiction. There is nothing new here. This holding is not "unrealistic" and does not place "a tremendous burden on the state courts" (Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 11).⁵ It is consistent with established constitutional analysis for which the state courts are not only very able but duty-bound to perform in our

⁴ E.g., Anderson v. Harless, 103 S.Ct. 276, 277 (1982); Duckworth v. Serrano, 454 U.S. 1, 3 (1981); Smith v. Digmon, 434 U.S. 332, 333 (1975); Pitchess v. Davis, 421 U.S. 482, 487-90 (1975); Smith v. Goguen, 415 U.S. 566, 576-77 (1974). See also generally P. Bator, P. Mishkin, D. Shapiro & H. Wechsler, Hart & Wechsler's The Federal Courts and the Federal System 1489 (1973); J. Cock, Constitutional Rights of the Accused -- Post-Trial Rights 265 (1976); J. Moore, M. Waxner, H. Eisenstein, S. Allen, A. Henschel, B. Lafferty, & S. Katz, 8C Moore's Federal Practice § 14.04 (2d ed. 1982); R. Popper, Post-Conviction Remedies 194-222 (1978); R. Sokol, Federal Habeas Corpus 166-67 (2d ed. 1969); D. Wilkes, Federal and State Postconviction Remedies and Relief 150-54 (1983); C. Wright, A. Miller, & E. Cooper, Federal Practice and Procedure § 4264 (1978); L. Yackle, Postconviction Remedies 257 (1981).

⁵ This case is its own best example. Following the guilty plea, the sentencing phase covers fewer than 300 pages of transcript. It can be read in its entirety in a short time. How else could the state habeas court adjudge the total effectiveness of defense counsel, except by reading the whole of the transcript? As is always true, the adversaries provided briefing guidance for the habeas court's reading of the record. It would be a strange system, indeed, if the writ opponent and the state court could read the entire record to deny relief but the applicant and the federal court could not read the entire record to grant relief.

federal system. Indeed, the exhaustion doctrine itself traditionally has deferred this first appraisal to the state habeas court. To use that doctrine to excuse the state court from reading the transcript would frustrate the policy behind the exhaustion doctrine.⁶

II. THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE DOES NOT PROHIBIT A STATE PRISONER FROM URGING HIS DEFENSE COUNSEL WAS INEFFECTIVE, IN PART, BECAUSE COUNSEL'S FAILURE TO OBJECT ADEQUATELY DID NOT PRESERVE THE ERRORS FOR STATE APPEAL AND EXPOSED THE SENTENCING JURY TO "COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT, IMMATERIAL, AND PREJUDICIAL"⁷ EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT CONCERNING THE GOOD CHARACTER OF THE VICTIM

Based on principles of comity and federalism, the procedural default doctrine prevents a federal habeas court from granting relief to a state prisoner on a claim which is unreviewable in state court, unless the federal court finds cause for, and prejudice from, the state court default. E.g., Engle v. Isaac, 456 U.S. 107, 128-29 (1982); Wainwright v. Sykes, 433 U.S. 72, 87 (1977). This doctrine has no application here. Respondent did not, and could not, make a constitutional claim against the admission of the prejudicial

⁶ Alternatively, the specific incidents of ineffectiveness which even Petitioner admits were properly presented in the State Court would themselves support the result in the Court of Appeals. The counsel errors concerning evidence of decedent's character were the principal examples relied on to hold counsel's performance ineffective and were the only errors considered by the Court below under the actual and substantial prejudice analysis and under the harmless error analysis. 708 F.2d at 965-66. The exhaustion issue concerned only those instances of substandard performance alleged on appeal which had not been explicitly enumerated in the state court pro se petition. Id. at 958.

⁷ Vela v. State, 516 S.W. 2d at 179.

evidence of decedent's character. Any such challenge would be solely cognizant in state court under state evidence law and there it was deemed not to have been preserved for review. See Vela v. State, 516 S.W.2d at 178-79. Proceeding under the incorporated sixth amendment, Respondent established defense counsel's overall ineffectiveness and highlighted counsel's serious ineptness concerning the character evidence of decedent which allowed admission and consideration by the jury and frustrated direct appellate review. The Court of Appeals concluded: first, Respondent's right to effective assistance of counsel was violated, second, Respondent's sentencing defense suffered actual and substantial prejudice as a result, and third, the state had failed to carry the burden of showing the error to be harmless. 708 F.2d at 965-66. The Court of Appeals required that Respondent show actual and substantial prejudice to establish the right to counsel violation. The court relied on en banc precedent which thus had brought into symmetry the prejudice prong of the incorporated sixth amendment with the cause and prejudice requirement of federal habeas law. Id. at 965 (citing Washington v. Strickland, 693 F.2d at 1258). See generally Washington v. Strickland, 693 F.2d at 1258, 1260-62 (quoting United States v. Frady, 456 U.S. 152, 170 (1982)). Contrary to Petitioner's second argument, "[s]ubstance has been synchronized with procedure." Baker, Criminal Procedure, 34 Mercer L.Rev. 1241, 1269 (1983). See also Tague, The Attempt to Improve Criminal Defense Representation 15 Am. Crim. L.Rev. 109, 128-30 (1977).

Even Petitioner could not ask for more. The procedural default doctrine of habeas corpus law cannot transcend the sixth and fourteenth amendments. Nowhere has Respondent defaulted on the right to counsel issue. Thus exposed, Petitioner's second argument cannot be considered here as appropriate for a writ of certiorari. Cf. Wainwright

v. Sykes, 433 U.S. at, 96 (Stevens, J., concurring); Id. at 99 (White, J., concurring); Id. at 118 (Brennan, J., dissenting); Francis v. Henderson, 425 U.S. 536, 548-49 n.2, 553 n.4 (Brennan, J., dissenting).

CONCLUSION

Petitioner falsely has promised, "There are special and important reasons for granting the writ" (Petition for Certiorari at 8). On the contrary, the reasons why the writ should be denied predominate. The decision below gave full consideration to the exhaustion issue and decided it correctly. The narrow exhaustion issue here simply is not important enough to warrant this Court's attention. The decision below follows a long and unbroken line of authority. This Court's own prior decisions are controlling and Petitioner has shown nothing to warrant a reexamination of settled principles of habeas corpus law. The procedural default issue Petitioner describes is not raised in this case.

For these reasons, the petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.⁷

⁷ While Respondent urges denial of the petition, one cannot ignore the degree of discretion operative here, the proper exercise of which even the Justices of this Court may disagree on. See, e.g., Anderson v. Harless, 103 S.Ct. 276, 280 (1982) (Stevens, J., dissenting); Boag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364, 368 (1982) (Rehnquist, J., dissenting). Should this Court decide to perform as a court of errors, Respondent respectfully requests the opportunity to brief and argue the merits beyond the limits of this Brief in Opposition.

Respectfully submitted,

(51)

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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONRADO U. VELA,

Respondent

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

MOTION OF RESPONDENT TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS

PROOF OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on the _____ day of October, 1983, one copy of the motion of Respondent to proceed in forma pauperis was mailed, postage prepaid, to Charles A. Palmer, Assistant Attorney General, P. O. Box 12548, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78711. All parties required to be served have been served. I am a member of the Bar of this Court.

151

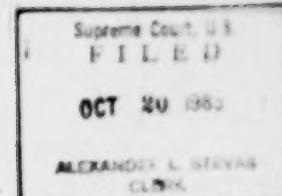
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SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME this _____ day of October, 1983.

NOTARY PUBLIC in and for
Lubbock County, Texas

MOTION FILED
OCT 20 1983



NO. 83-506

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
— OCTOBER TERM, 1983

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONPADO U. VELA,

Respondent

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

MOTION OF RESPONDENT FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED
IN FORMA PAUPERIS

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IN THE
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

NO. 83-506

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONRADO U. VELA,

Respondent

MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED
IN FORMA PAUPERIS

The Respondent, Conrado U. Vela, who is now held in a Texas prison, asks leave to file the attached Brief in Opposition and to proceed in forma pauperis pursuant to Rule 46.1. SUP. CT. R. 46.1.

On October 14, 1982, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit appointed counsel for Respondent pursuant to the Criminal Justice Act of 1964, as amended. That appointment continues to date. See Rule on the Fifth Circuit Plan Under the Criminal Justice Act at 4. Thus, no affidavit is attached here. See 18 U.S.C. § 3006A(d)(6). Prior leave to proceed in forma pauperis was granted first, on Respondent's state court direct appeal by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals and, second, in an Order dated November 12, 1981 entered by the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

151

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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
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Petitioner

v.

CONRADO U. VELA,

Respondent

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

MOTION OF RESPONDENT TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS

PROOF OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on the _____ day of October, 1983, one copy of the motion of Respondent to proceed in forma pauperis was mailed, postage prepaid, to Charles A. Palmer, Assistant Attorney General, P. O. Box 12548, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78711. All parties required to be served have been served. I am a member of the Bar of this Court.

151

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SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME this _____ day of October, 1983.

NOTARY PUBLIC in and for
Lubbock County, Texas

NO. 83-506

Supreme Court, U.S.
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DEC 12 1983
ALEXANDER L. STEVENS
CLERK

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

DAN V. MCKASLE, ACTING DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

Petitioner

v.

CONRADO U. VELA,

Respondent

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

SUPPLEMENTAL BRIEF OF
RESPONDENT IN OPPOSITION

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OCTOBER TERM, 1983

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ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

SUPPLEMENTAL BRIEF OF
RESPONDENT IN OPPOSITION

I.

This matter is on petition for a writ of certiorari
seeking review of the decision of the United States Court of
Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d 954
(5th Cir.), rehearing and en banc rehearing denied, ____ F.2d
____ (1983).

This supplemental brief in opposition is filed in response to the Court's November 29, 1983, request for copies of the petition for writ of habeas corpus filed in the state court, any response, and the order denying relief. These papers were not included in Petitioner's originally filed Appendices A and B or in Petitioner's later filed Appendices C, D, and F when Respondent filed the first Brief of Respondent in Opposition. Thus, the requested state court papers constitute "intervening matter not available at the time of the party's last filing." S. Ct. R. 22.6.¹

II.

The first brief of Respondent in opposition describes the state habeas court proceedings and the subsequent federal proceedings. Brief of Respondent in Opposition at 2-5. This Court's perusal of the after-requested documents will confirm that preliminary account. Those documents strengthen that earlier discussion, amplified here, that the exhaustion doctrine has been satisfied.

The exhaustion issue which Petitioner has injected into this proceeding involves the supplemental brief filed by counsel appointed for the first time on appeal in the Fifth Circuit. Petitioner persists in objecting to the thoroughness and sophistication of the court-appointed counsel's briefing.

As for thoroughness, the state habeas court exhibited the same level of thoroughness in searching the record for particular positive aspects of defense counsel's trial performance. See Brief of Respondent in Opposition at 2, 4-5. Petitioner's own advocacy matched that same level of thoroughness in

¹ Respondent has not been served with a copy of the after-requested documents. The discussion here necessarily relies on prior briefing and record excerpts in counsel's papers from the Court below.

opposing the issuance of the writ of habeas corpus in the Court below. See generally Supplemental Brief of Respondent - Appellee in Vela v. Estelle, 708 F.2d 954 (5th Cir. 1983).

Apparently, Petitioner is opposed to thoroughness only when it characterizes a winning advocacy on behalf of a prisoner.

As for sophistication, this Court is reminded that on state court direct appeal, defense counsel, who was ineffective at trial, represented Respondent and urged as error three state law evidence points which involved three of the most egregious errors he himself made. Brief of Appellant passim in Vela v. State, 516 S.W.2d 176 (Tex. Crim. App. 1974). On state and federal habeas trial proceedings, Respondent appeared pro se and presented as best he could the ineffectiveness claim under the sixth and fourteenth amendments. Respondent appeared pro se again in the Court of Appeals. After the case was briefed there, the Fifth Circuit sua sponte appointed present counsel and requested supplemental briefing. Appointed counsel invoked the same protections, briefed the same issue, and relied on the same record.

Petitioner should not be heard to complain that Respondent's court-appointed attorney provided the Fifth Circuit with a more thorough and more sophisticated advocacy of the same issue and the same facts for three reasons.

First, since Respondent appeared pro se before the state habeas court, less may be demanded in the way of explicit exhaustion. Blankenship v. Estelle, 545 F.2d 510, 514-15 (5th Cir. 1977), cert. denied, 444 U.S. 856 (1979); Macon v. Lash, 458 F.2d 942, 949 (7th Cir. 1972); S. Sokol, Federal Habeas Corpus, 167 (2d ed. 1969); L. Yackle, Post Conviction Remedies § 112 at 432 (1981); cf. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972) (allegations of pro se litigant are held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers). If less is required, exhaustion has been satisfied.

Second, nothing less would discharge court-appointed counsel's duties to his client and the appointing Court. See A.B.A. Standards for Criminal Justice §§ 22-4.3 (Appointment of Counsel in postconviction remedies) & 21-3.7 (Counsel on appeal) (1980); Annot., 15 A.L.R.4th 582 (1982) (Adequacy of Defense Counsel's Representation of Criminal Client Regarding Appellate and Postconviction Remedies). Petitioner's wooden version of exhaustion would require every later court-appointed counsel to file a brief with the appointing Court which was a cut-and-pasted copy of any earlier filed pro se pleadings and briefs. The present appeal is a good example. For every record reference and citation of authority in Respondent's supplemental brief in the Court of Appeals not contained in the Respondent's pro se state application, Petitioner would be heard to cry foul. What then was the reason for the Court of Appeals to have appointed present counsel? See generally Rule on the Fifth Circuit Plan Under the Criminal Justice Act (implementing and supplementing 18 U.S.C. § 3006A (1964)). As described in the first brief of Respondent in opposition, a correct understanding of the policy and doctrine of exhaustion requires affirmance of the Court of Appeals.

Third, the exhaustion issue Petitioner raised was fully and fairly litigated in the Court below. Petitioner conceded exhaustion in the district court. Having had the benefit of extensive briefing, the three judge panel of the Court of Appeals carefully considered and decided the issue. More than eight pages of the panel opinion are devoted to the issue. See Appendix B, B-8 -- B-16, Petition for a Writ of Certiorari. The three panel judges and the full en banc complement of fourteen judges denied rehearing on the exhaustion issue. Of course, there is some measure of reviewability of the exhaustion doctrine. The doctrine is only a rule of timing, however, and not jurisdictional. See generally Yackle, The Exhaustion

Doctrine in Federal Habeas Corpus: An Argument for Return to First Principles Ohio St. L.J. 393, 440-14 (1983). The considered judgment of the federal judges who regularly apply the doctrine should be entitled to some measure of deference. Nothing is to be gained by reviewing the court below. This Court should not act as a court of errors and second guess all exhaustion decisions. Nothing about this exhaustion decision is unique in the run of exhaustion decisions. Neither an affirmance nor a reversal will add to the habeas corpus jurisprudence. This Court has better things to do.

III.

Consider this exhaustion issue from the standpoint of Respondent, an imprisoned pro se litigant who has presented his own petitions and briefs in losing efforts, who has had counsel appointed to assist him, who has had his most fundamental right to counsel vindicated by three and then fourteen federal judges. Petitioner would have this Court tell this man that had he only made express what he made implicit three years ago -- had he added a caret in his state court petition and scrawled in the margin this much: "Defense Counsel's overall performance was inadequate, but three examples predominated . . ." -- then the federal court could hear him now. Has the Great Writ come to this? Neither Respondent nor the Court below understood the writ and this record that way.

In conclusion, the after-requested documents strengthen Respondent's position that the petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.²

Respectfully submitted,

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² Fealty to client and Court compels the disclosure of the under-signed counsel's anxiety at learning of the Court's request. There is a concern that this Court might grant the writ and summarily reverse this case based on an erroneous exhaustion argument. Counsel here renews the request of the Brief of Respondent in Opposition n. 7 at 11:

While Respondent urges denial of the petition, one cannot ignore the degree of discretion operative here, the proper exercise of which even the Justices of this Court may disagree on. See e.g., Anderson v. Harless, 103 S.Ct. 276, 280 (1982) (Stevens, J., dissenting); Roag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364, 368 (1982) (Rehnquist, J., dissenting). Should this Court decide to perform as a court of errors, Respondent respectfully requests the opportunity to brief and argue the merits beyond the limits of this Brief in Opposition.

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Supreme Court, U.S.
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CLERK

NO. 83-506

IN THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT
OCTOBER TERM, 1983

W. J. ESTELLE, JR., DIRECTOR,
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,
Petitioner

V.

CONRADO VELA,

Respondent

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari
To The United States Court Of Appeals
For The Fifth Circuit

PETITIONER'S REPLY BRIEF

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NO. 83-506

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To The United States Court Of Appeals
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PETITIONER'S REPLY BRIEF

TO THE HONORABLE JUSTICES OF THE
SUPREME COURT:

NOW COMES W. J. Estelle, Jr., Director, Texas
Department of Corrections, Petitioner herein, by and
through his attorney, the Attorney General of Texas, and
submits this his Reply Brief.

- I. THE HOLDING OF THE COURT OF APPEALS
THAT PETITIONER SATISFIED THE
STATUTORY EXHAUSTION REQUIREMENT

CONSTITUTES A RADICAL DEPARTURE
FROM PRIOR DECISIONS OF THIS COURT
AND IS A SUFFICIENT REASON TO GRANT
THE WRIT OF CERTIORARI.

Respondent makes the hollow assertion that Petitioner has overstated the holding of the Court of Appeals (Brief in Opposition at 6, 7) and that the question presented "is nothing new . . ." (Brief in Opposition at 8). In fact, however, Respondent is unable to cite a single decision of this Court or any Court of Appeals which is consistent with the Fifth Circuit's holding in this case. As argued at length in the petition for writ of certiorari, the Fifth Circuit's holding is a legal aberration in that it dispenses with the long-standing requirement that a federal habeas petitioner must *fairly present* his claims to the state court in order to exhaust his state remedies. Respondent is unable to cite a single authority which has found exhaustion on claims which were never pled in the state courts.

It is axiomatic that a habeas petitioner has exhausted his state remedies when he raises a claim in the state court system regardless whether it is addressed on the merits. *Smith v. Digmon*, 434 U.S. 332 (1978). Conversely, a habeas petitioner should not be held to have exhausted his state remedies on a variety of unpled Sixth Amendment allegations simply because the state court, in denying relief, considered the totality of the circumstances. Petitioner argues that this issue is unworthy of the Court's attention because no similar case has arisen within the past three months (Brief in Opposition at 6 & n.2). Respondent does not, because he cannot, dispute the practical problems which will be caused by the Court of Appeals' holding, *i.e.*, that a state habeas court will be required to review the entire record of a criminal trial, even one comprising thousands of pages, any time a state habeas applicant alleges that the totality of counsel's representation was constitutionally deficient. There is no basis in logic or precedent for such a rule of law. Further,

this holding is clearly not confined solely to claims of ineffective assistance of counsel. Under the reasoning of Respondent and the Fifth Circuit, a habeas petitioner need only allege that the "totality" of the trial court's jury instructions were deficient without pointing to any specific error, and he will be deemed to have exhausted any claim as to any conceivable defect in those instructions. *See* Petition at 12-13. Respondent's contrary assertions notwithstanding, the question presented for this Court's attention is one of exceptional importance with far-reaching consequences. If left uncorrected, the Court of Appeals' decision will seriously impinge upon the comity considerations which support this Court's decisions in *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977), *Engle v. Isaac*, 456 U.S. 107 (1982) and *Rose v. Lundy*, 445 U.S. 509 (1982). The writ should issue to review the Fifth Circuit's novel and illogical construction of the statutory exhaustion doctrine.

II. THE HOLDING OF THE COURT OF APPEALS WELL ILLUSTRATES THE TENSION THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE PROCEDURAL DEFAULT DOCTRINE AND THE SIXTH AMENDMENT RIGHT TO COUNSEL AND CONSTITUTES A SUFFICIENT BASIS FOR ISSUANCE OF THE WRIT.

The fatal flaw in the Court of Appeals' finding of ineffective assistance is that it puts habeas petitioners in a "no lose" posture. Under the reasoning of Respondent and the Fifth Circuit, a habeas petitioner whose claims are barred by the procedural default doctrine need only recast his allegations in Sixth Amendment terms in order to obtain federal habeas corpus relief. This is an issue which surely will arise again in the Fifth Circuit and others and one which should be conclusively resolved by this Court.

Respectfully submitted,

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